

THE ECONOMIC REPORT

A SUPPLEMENT OF *The Chronicle*

Economists Discuss ‘Covid Unmasked’ at Summit

Sponsored and Organized by the Alliance of Lewis County, Summit Features Economic Experts

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County hosted on Wednesday a Post Covid Summit titled “Covid Unmasked,” which focused on economic opportunities and obstacles for our upcoming economic future.

The summit featured two econo-

mists and several legislators and took place at The Loft in Chehalis before a packed house. The economists discussed supply chain disruption, inflation, logistics, rising gas prices and obstacles in hiring competent workers.

The keynote speaker was Spencer Cohen, owner of High Peak Strategy LLC, a Seattle-based economics and research consulting firm with expertise in regional economic analysis, international trade research, and U.S.-China relations.



SPENCER COHEN



MARK HARMSWORTH

He is a 2021-2023 Public Intellectuals Program fellow with the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and affiliate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Washington.

Cohen is a recognized expert on port economic impacts, U.S.-China trade and economic relations and international trade. He speaks fluent Mandarin.

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CHAIRMAN’S CORNER

Economic Experts Show a Way Forward

Economic Alliance of Lewis County Fulfills Name Change by Promoting Unity

BY BEN KOSTICK

Chairman - Economic Alliance of Lewis County

I was honored, as my position of Chair of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County, to introduce one of the speakers at Wednesday’s Post Covid Summit titled “Covid Unmasked,” which focused on economic opportunities and obstacles for our upcoming economic future.

Held at The Loft in Chehalis, the speakers before a packed house focused on the driving economic forces businesses large and small face: supply chain disruption, inflation, logistics, high gas prices and the difficulties in hiring competent workers.

The featured speaker was economist Spencer Cohen, principal and founder of High Peak Strategy LLC, an economics and research consulting firm based in Seattle, specializing in regional economic analysis, international trade research, and U.S.-China relations.

He was impressive and his deep knowledge of the current and future economy was off the charts. He is a 2021-2023 Public Intellectuals Program fellow with the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and affiliate professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Washington.

Spencer is a recognized expert on regional economic analysis, port economic impacts, U.S.-China trade and economic relations, China’s economy, industry clusters, and international trade. He even speaks Mandarin.

Another speaker was Mark Harmsworth with the Washington Policy Center. Harmsworth is a former Republican Representative with the state Legislature and a business owner dealing with new economic realities we face these days.

Also speaking were five state Legislators who detailed efforts to help the state economy despite efforts by Democrats to spend, spend, spend as they are in control of the Governor’s Mansion and both the House and Senate.

Finally, I need to give a shout-out to Ellen Buzzard, who entertained those gathered with her guitar playing and pleasant singing before the summit and after during a social hour. She is fabulous.

It was a worthwhile, eye-opening summit that I was proud the Economic Alliance of Lewis County organized.

Alliance Brings Groups Together for Potential Hydrogen Project

When the Alliance changed its name back in November of 2021 from the Lewis County Economic Development Council to the Economic Alliance of

■ SEE **CHAIRMAN**, PAGE C2



BEN KOSTICK
Chairman - Economic Alliance of Lewis County

Centralia’s Fox Theatre Open House Signals Renewed Efforts for Renovations

Community Effort Aims to Raise \$2.5 Million for the Crown Jewel of Centralia to Become Operational

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County hosted an open house at the Historic Centralia Fox Theatre to inform the community of renovation progress and an invigorated effort to finish the project, which will need about \$2.5 million to become operational.

Scott White, who has been focused on restoration efforts since 2008, spoke about the renewed efforts to finish the project during the open house.

“This is very exciting for a lot of us who have been involved in this project for a long time,” White told those gathered at the open house. “... It’s exciting, it’s actually been five years since we’ve had any public in here.”

White is encouraged by recent efforts.



Jason Baker, PacNW Photography, pacnwphotography.com

The Centralia Fox Theatre hosted an open house to discuss recent efforts to reinvigorate fund raising efforts toward renovations. Pictured is a photograph from the balcony highlighting the ornate stage.

“There is an incredible energy now around this project,” White said. “You are here which I think is a big part of that energy and there’s a board of directors that are excited and motivated and want

to get this thing done and they are going to do that. I think there’s a lot to be positive about.”

■ SEE **FOX THEATER**, PAGE C3

Dotson Awarded First Ever Gary Stamper Scholarship

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County awarded Gary Dotson a \$1,500 scholarship at Senior Night at White Pass High School, given in honor of the late Lewis County Commissioner Gary Stamper, who died from Covid-19 complications last year.

This was the first awarding of the Gary Stamper Scholarship.

He will be continuing his education by attending Lower Columbia College to pursue his Bachelor of Science in Childhood Education and then onto Western Governors University to get his Masters in Secondary Education. He has already received his Associates of Arts degree at Centralia College where he is on the Dean’s List. He is also a member of the National Honor Society for all four years of high school, and Valedictorian of the class of 2022.

He has several athletic achievements in basketball where he was team captain all four years. Stamper was a notable high school basketball coach which was one of his passions.

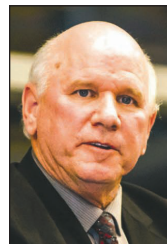
Dotson is active in his community by assisting elderly neighbors by shoveling snow filled driveways during the winter and has helped another neighbor fix his truck bumper. He would like to stay in Lewis County and teach at a 2B or 1A school upon completion of his college education.

“Gary Stamper would be proud of the first selection of the scholarship in his name,” said Economic Alliance of Lewis County Executive Director Richard DeBolt.

The public is encouraged to donate to the scholarship fund so Stamper’s legacy can be carried out year after year.



GARY DOTSON



GARY STAMPER

“I just think it’s a way to honor him and the gift that he gave to the community and all of his years of service as being a commissioner and being a basketball coach and just being Gary around the community,” said Dolly Tardiff of the

Economic Alliance. “He was such a happy and inspirational man and it’s the least we can do to give this tribute back to the community in his name.”

IF YOU WANT TO DONATE:

• Call 360-748-0114

• Mail checks to P.O. Box 916, Chehalis, WA 98532; Make checks payable to Economic Alliance of Lewis County

• Venmo @Economicalliance

SPONSORED CONTENT

THURSTON-LEWIS-MASON CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL

WSLC Uses Power of Unity to Benefit All Workers

BY THE WASHINGTON STATE LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO

When workers join together in unions, they have more power to negotiate better wages and working conditions than they do as individuals.

“When unions work together, their members can negotiate better contracts, earn more money, and boost our state and local economies,” said WSLC President Larry Brown. “But they also use that power to fight for working standards that benefit everyone. Higher minimum wages, paid sick leave, paid family leave, access to overtime pay—all of these were fought for and won by Washington’s labor movement, but they benefit all workers. That’s

the power of collective action and joining together.”

The WSLC also has a number of programs of specific benefit to all workers, including:

Workforce Development—This department advocates for all workers from initial entry into the workforce by promoting apprenticeship opportunities, to career transition when workers need help with retraining, to assisting those facing job loss.

For example, the WSLC Workforce Development helps file petitions for the Trade Adjustment Assistance, a federal program that provides aid to workers who lose their jobs due to offshoring or increased imports. As a result, thousands of workers in Washington

state currently have access to TAA benefits like relocation assistance, training/tuition support, extended income support, partial wage replacement for older workers, and more.

Project Help—This WSLC program assists injured workers in Washington with the early and successful resolution of workers’ compensation claims. It provides educational and one-on-one claims assistance to all interested persons. Get details at www.ProjectHelpWA.com.

Learn more about the WSLC at www.wslc.org and get the latest information about Washington’s union movement at the WSLC’s award-winning news service, The Stand, at www.TheStand.org.



BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

JT SINGH MUNDI - BUSINESS: KODENUM INC, PETRO AMERICA INC, UNITED POLITICAL LLC

Q: How long have you been a member of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County?

A: One year

Q: Why did you join the Alliance?:

A: I joined the Alliance to help drive business growth in Lewis County by leveraging my entrepreneurial and technical background.

Q: What is a key for the success of your business?:

A: The key to success for my business is that I focus on solving real customer problems rather than selling products or services. I work backward from the core customer challenges to create simple but not complex solutions that solve customer problems. I believe in saying no to projects outside my areas of expertise and focusing only on the projects that can be delivered with excellence.

Q: What do you enjoy most about

volunteering?

A: Contributing to our community’s success is the best gratification for me. I enjoy it when others succeed, and can avoid the mistakes I have made.

Q: What do you love most about your industry?

A: The world has produced 90% of its Big Data in the past two years! New technologies like Quantum Computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Virtual Reality (VR), and Robotics are emerging fast and have a growing adoption in the industry. I love being curious to learn about these new technologies and leveraging them to solve real world problems.

Q: How do you define success?



JT SINGH MUNDI
Kodenum Inc, Petro America Inc, United Political LLC

A: Success is a perception for me. Losing a contract is a failure for one company and a success for another. But if the other company perceives it as a learning opportunity it is also a success for them.

Q: Who inspires you?

A: I consider my father a powerful role model as an entrepreneur and an example of a positive, persevering mindset. I have also surrounded myself with other great mentors, innovators, and problem-solvers over the years.

Q: What is one thing, either industry-related or not, you learned in the last month?

A: Fail fast and learn. Failing is part of your success, do not allocate more resources to a failing product or service. It is best to fail fast, learn from mistakes and pivot your current strategy. I love this quote from Thomas Edison: “I have not failed.

I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Q: What’s the last book you read?

A: The Phoenix Project by Gene Kim

Q: What is your favorite meal?

A: Chicken Curry

Q: What do you do for pleasure outside of running your business?

A: I like to travel and explore new places. I enjoy cooking local dishes from the places I visit using traditional recipes.

Q: What is the favorite car you have ever owned?

A: Ram 1500

Q: What is something about you (a fun fact) that not many people know?

A: I am fluent in reading, writing, and speaking three languages, Hindi, English, and Punjabi. I am also a licensed HAM radio operator, proud to be the 0.2%.

CC Breaks Ground for ‘Field of Dreams’

Sports Complex Powered by Student Body Fees of \$3M

BY THE ECONOMIC
ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

Construction of a new multisport athletics complex at the corner of Iron Street and Centralia College Boulevard began in spring 2022.

Groundbreaking Celebration for the Centralia College Multipurpose Athletic Field took place May 25 in front of the Michael Smith Gymnasium at Centralia College.

“The students of Centralia College have been raising funds for this project since 2013, according to a Centralia College news release. “Their years of work is making this turf facility for baseball, softball, and soccer a beautiful reality.”

Demolition and site prep as well as electrical, lighting, and water systems prep will take the project into summer. Fences, curbs, and the field base is scheduled to be completed in early fall. Turf installation and finishing work (curbs, fencing, etc.) expected to be completed in October-November.

State Rep. Peter Abbarno, R-Centralia, and a former Centralia College Foundation President, call the project our “Field of Dreams.”

“Great effort by Centralia College Student Government, Centralia College Foundation, Centralia College, city of Centralia, and the community for their commitment to break ground and build a sports complex on campus of the oldest community college in continuous operation in the state of Washington (since 1925),” Abbarno said. “I’m proud to be part of this project as a former city councilmember, Foundation Board member, and former Foundation President.”

The sports complex, which will include fields for baseball, softball, and soccer, will use modern turf composed of grass-like fibers supported by soft, tiny balls of cork or other material that works like dirt to hold each blade aloft. The turf is porous, allowing rain to flow



Jason Baker, PacNW Photography, pacnwphotography.com

Construction has started on a new multisport athletic field on the campus of Centralia College. The gymnasium is pictured at top left.

**IF YOU WANT TO
DONATE:**

The CC Foundation will be seeking donors to sponsor other amenities for this turf field. If you are interested or have ideas, please contact

**Christine Fossett at
360-623-8451 or
foundation@centralia.edu.**

straight through into a drainage system. There’s no need to wait for the field to dry out to play.

“The new fields will encourage more athletic participation and enhance Centralia College’s recruiting power,” according to the release. “The college plans to add a men’s soccer team once the field is completed. It already fields teams for women’s soccer, baseball, and softball. Those teams currently play on shared community fields in Centralia.”

Annalee Tobey Appointed to Centralia College Board of Trustees

Experience Chehalis Director Annalee Tobey has been appointed to the Centralia College Board of Trustees, the college announced Wednesday.

Tobey replaces Debbie Campbell, who resigned in December after three years of service.

Tobey’s first official meeting as a trustee was June 9.

“Annalee brings amazing energy and great experience to the board,” said Centralia College President Bob Mohr-

bacher. “She’s deeply involved in the community and she’s committed to students and the economic vitality of Lewis County.”

Tobey has been the executive director of Experience Chehalis, a downtown association committed to beautification projects, economic development and community-building, since 2017. She has a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Pacific Lutheran University.



An architect’s rendering of the new Centralia College ballfields.

The college has been planning for this addition since 1999, when it started buying up the 40-some lots needed for the complex. Students have contributed more than \$3 million toward the project through student fees, but more is needed to improve and finish the site.

The Centralia College Foundation is raising funds to provide ancillary equipment to enhance the athlete and fan experience. The foundation’s recent gala raised money for sound systems for all three fields, as well as portable bleachers for soccer and overflow seating.

the Adna Booster Club.

“It is a great honor to be appointed,” Tobey said. “My goal this year is to become acquainted with the Centralia College community, so I can serve as a strong and well-informed advocate for the success of the institution.”

Trustees are appointed by the governor for five-year terms for a maximum of 10 years, according to Centralia College.



ANNALEE TOBEY
*Experience Chehalis
Director*

She serves on a number of local boards, including the Economic Alliance of Lewis County, the Discover! Children’s Museum, the Washington Main Street Advisory Board, Women United and the Chehalis Lodging Tax Advisory Committee. She is also the treasurer of

together on common interests.

Which brings us to last month’s announcement of a potential \$600 million green hydrogen project at the Industrial Park at TransAlta. DeBolt somehow managed to put together a coalition of the willing.

The project still has hurdles to climb, but the global green energy company Fortescue Future Industries plans to turn some of the former TransAlta coal mine infrastructure into green hydrogen production right here in Centralia.

My main point is this illustrates the emphasis of the Alliance to bring people and groups together for the economic benefit of Lewis County. Kudos to DeBolt for illustrating with the hydrogen announcement the benefits of working together as an alliance.

...

Ben Kostick is chair of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County and owner of Ben M. Kostick CPA Inc.

CHAIRMAN:

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Lewis County, we added a new emphasis of bringing people and entities together.

At the time of the name change, Executive Director Richard DeBolt said the name change is not a new direction from its bedrock mission of economic development, but adds an emphasis on forming alliances with others for the greater good.

“We’re still committed to economic development, but we’ve added a commitment to forming partnerships with all agencies, groups and government entities interested in wise economic growth for Lewis County,” DeBolt said.

I was highly supportive of this effort to form unity. At the time of the name change I believed an alliance atmosphere will help us work with everyone by forming partnerships. We are more successful when we work

PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT — 2530 KRESKY AVENUE, SUITE C • CHEHALIS — FOR LEASE

- This building was built in 2014
- 8,000 square feet
- There is a common bathroom in the entrance of the building
- Suite C is 2,100 square feet. This has been an office space for a financial business and is currently being occupied as a medical facility
- Suite C includes open waiting area, enclosed reception desk with space for filing, 3 separate offices/exam rooms, 1 bathroom, 1 breakroom
- Term of lease and rent amount is negotiable
- Current lease expires Sept. 30, 2022



For information on this property and others available throughout Lewis County (or to list your industrial/commercial property for sale or lease), contact Economic Alliance of Lewis County External Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg at 208.206.5407 or eric@lewiscountyalliance.org, or go to lewisdc.com.

SUMMIT:

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Mark Harmsworth with the Washington Policy Center also talked economics. Harmsworth, a former Republican Representative with the state Legislature, is a business owner faced with rising transportation costs and difficulties in hiring.

Five state Legislators detailed efforts to help the state economy and the difficulties in working with a Democrat-dominated state government.

Richard DeBolt, Executive Director of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County, in his opening remarks, said he hoped the summit allowed for an atmosphere of open discussions “to help you make decisions as we move forward” from the impacts of the pandemic and inflation woes.

Cohen talked about unpacking inflation causes, supply side complaints, up-

heaval with trade relations with China and the long term impacts to Washington state.

He said he believes the Federal Reserve is better educated today in dealing with inflation and trade difficulties compared to efforts in the 70s and 80s, adding inflation is simply a reaction to supply and demand. He said last year’s federal stimulus package, supply side problems, China’s lockdown (and tariffs) due to the pandemic and other factors are driving inflation.

“With stimulus funding people are spending more, buying more, which is another cause of inflation,” he said.

He said he is not trying to sugarcoat the impacts of inflation, but did note that wages are up 13.9%. He said with a tight labor market, wages will continue to rise.

Cohen said a particular problem is a lack of truck drivers and limited warehouses as businesses attempt to ramp up

as economic patterns change coming out of the pandemic. He added the pandemic has changed our economy. For example, the rise in online purchases has stressed out our warehouses, trucking and ports. He said he does see some relief as trucking costs are starting to drop, although there remains a long haul trucking shortage. He said ports globally are also causing problems as 77% of ports worldwide suffer from backlogs.

“Supply chain is the biggest culprit of inflation,” Cohen said, and “imports are critical to Washington’s economy.”

Harmsworth said drivers of inflation in Washington state are caused by rising gasoline costs, supply chain disruptions, a labor shortage and stimulus payments that allowed people to not work, but still draw federal money into their pockets.

Harmsworth also worries about an upcoming state gas tax that will raise gasoline costs by 50 cents, starting Jan. 1. He

said it is no coincidence that the rate increase comes a month and half after state and federal elections.

“It’s a bad idea,” he said. “Washington already pays a high (gas) tax rate.”

Harmsworth said the gas tax will just get passed on to consumers. Higher transportation costs create higher costs in a wide variety of goods and services.

He also pointed out problems with a state carbon tax, and a state mandate to ban gas cars in favor of electric vehicles by 2030. The state considering breaching Snake River dams in Eastern Washington if made a reality would cause electrical rates to jump.

Despite the headwinds, Harmsworth sees blue skies ahead for the Evergreen State and its position as central to the global economy with its proximity to markets in Asia.

“I’m really excited about Washington state,” he said.

FOX THEATER:

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Todd Chaput of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County thanked White.

“This is his big dream and we wouldn’t be here without Scott,” Chaput said. “... Right now with the current board we’re really excited that the Economic Alliance of Lewis County board allowed us to be a part of this. It’s important for the Alliance to actualize and realize this as an operating theater.”

Chaput said to get the theater operational, the project needs \$2.5 million. The project hit bumps in finishing the project due to cost increases and the past two years of the pandemic. Chaput said they are applying for grants, and so far have submitted the project for funding of about \$12 million in potential grant funding.

“This is something that needs to get done,” he said. “This is going to be a centerpiece for downtown Centralia and it’s going to be an important part of economic development and tourism for Centralia.”

He said when the theater does open, it will help pack the city on weekends, bringing dollars into the Hub City.

“Our goal is to have this place operational in 18 months to two years,” Chaput said. “We have the board in place and people are engaged to make this happen.”

great movie and vaudeville theaters for which Fox had become so well known and was well suited for live performances as it was for talking pictures. The theater put Centralia square on the national map of touring shows and in line for the latest blockbusters from Hollywood.

The Fox instantly became the center of small city life. Centralia was populated by loggers, miners, intellectuals, devout Christians, union members and fiercely loyal veterans. The downtown bustled with shops, hotels, theaters, restaurants and some infamous houses of gambling and prostitution.

Only 11 years earlier the town had been ripped apart by the Centralia Massacre, pitting the Union Wobblies against the Veterans of the American Legion and ending in bloodshed. But despite such diversity and adversity, the Fox was the gathering place for everyone in the community. It was a source of great pride and a respite from what were becoming very challenging times at the onset of the Great Depression.

The Centralia Fox Theatre was built by Seattle architect Frank Wynkoop, who was working out of the office of Robert Reamer best known for his Old-

Faithful Lodge and other buildings in Yellowstone National Park as well as the opulent Fox Theatre in Spokane. The result was ornate art-deco meets Western simplicity with elaborate carved plaster overlayed in precious metals, decorative plaster step-ups graduating into the theater from the stage, and sleek art deco

chandeliers in gold, silver, and bronze.

Centralia’s most famous resident, the great modern dance pioneer Merce Cunningham, once mentioned in an interview that the two things he remembered most about his boyhood home in Washington were the Cascade Mountains and the Fox Theater.

The History of Centralia’s Fox Theatre

Centralia’s Fox Theatre opened its doors on Sept. 10, 1930, according to information from the theater’s web site. The ornate, 1,200 seat art deco member of the Fox West Coast Theatre chain cemented Centralia’s significance as the Hub City of Washington state.

The Fox was the biggest theater between Portland and Tacoma, and brought the glamor and glitz of Hollywood to the rough and tumble “Little Chicago” as Centralia was often called. The Fox was built in the tradition of the

The Historic Centralia Fox Theatre presents Casino Royale Night

The Centralia Fox Theatre presents an opulent night of gambling, gowns and champagne in the beautiful, historic theater. Sip signature cocktails while you experience a night of lavish entertainment against the backdrop of Centralia’s crown jewel. This is the social event of the year, with live music, a whiskey and cigar garden, VIP lounge, complimentary champagne and Hors D’oeuvres. The event is Saturday, Oct. 8. Call 360-506-4925 to sign up or for more information.




ERIC SONNENBERG
EXTERNAL RELATIONS MANAGER

Meet the Economic Alliance

QUICK FACTS...

Eric Sonnenberg is the Economic Alliance External Relations Manager who works closely with the Washington State Dept. of Commerce and multiple other organizations within the community. He volunteers on multiple boards in both Chehalis and Centralia. Eric has been employed with the Alliance since 2018 and he resides in Chehalis with his wife and three children.

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