

## Alliance to open Business Equity Center

*Dolly Tardiff tagged to lead up the center and its mission of helping underserved people and businesses thrive*

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

Dolly Tardiff's duties at the Economic Alliance of Lewis County are wide-ranging, but as the Business Development Center program manager, she finds gratification in helping small business owners find their way through the difficulties of running a business.

Now she's about to head up the Alliance's new project —the Business Equity Center (BEC) — think of it as business development assistance on steroids.

The BEC is set to open in the Alliance offices this summer. They're in the process of hiring a full-time outreach coordinator and finalizing details, after receiving grants from the TransAlta's Centralia Coal Transition Board, as well as from Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council to fund the burgeoning effort.

The BEC came about after Tardiff answered a phone call from a man who owns an RV park in the far end of East Lewis County, out past Packwood. He needed to hire an employee. He'd never put together an invoice. He didn't know how to go about it. They talked for nearly

two hours.

The staff at the Alliance discussed the call. They decided it was time to offer assistance for those who need some extra help in running or starting a new business.

"Being a business owner can sometimes be intimidating," Tardiff said. "To have someone sitting right next to you — it can help take the fear away. The BEC will be a place that community members can just walk in and get help. We are going to help them either transition into a job, or give them the skills to start a new business."

Tardiff is excited.

"It's right up my alley, helping people with the skills and tools they need to get back to work or start a business," she said. "If a business closes down, for example, we can help workers with transitioning."

The program will benefit veterans, minorities, low-income, underserved and rural communities by providing low to no-cost programs and resources to businesses and entrepreneurs within the county. Programs offered through the BEC will include free educational workshops focused on common business concerns for start-ups or businesses ready to scale up, participation in panel discussions giving access to industry expert knowledge and feedback, sliding scale community workspaces, incubator program opportunities, accelerator program opportunities, financial literacy classes, support for displaced workers and/or workers reentering the workforce in need of skill training, bilingual staff support, and access to language transla-



**DOLLY TARDIFF**  
Business Development Center Program Manager  
Economic Alliance of Lewis County

tion kiosks to process government forms and documents.

The BEC will focus on the nuts and bolts of finding a job or running a business, with such basics as resume writing, setting up an email, using social media, learning QuickBooks, developing contracts and making estimates for potential work.

Want to start a business? The BEC can walk you through the proper business structure, from an LLC, partnership, sole proprietor or organizing as a corporation. The BEC will be able to help

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### CHAIR'S CORNER

## Spring has sprung!

*So have new regulations. Is hydrogen undone?*

BY LUKE MOERKE

Chair - Economic Alliance of Lewis County

We were recently gifted with the kind of weather that many of us Pacific Northwesterners glory in for spring. Longer days filled with sunshine and modest temps. I have to say, even though it often changes to rain and cold abruptly in the spring, I love this kind of PNW weather.

There have been a lot of things happening in the region. As with the quickly changing weather, so is the quickly changing economics of our times.

There have been devastating losses to cherry growers in our state due to low harvests last year, and questionable harvests this year due to consistent frost. We on the Western slopes of the Cascades don't typically take notice of these things, but we might notice later this year when looking for cherries in our produce isles. The USDA declared a disaster to open additional funding for cherry growers. Washington and Oregon combine to produce over 70% of the nation's sweet cherries according to the Northwest Horticultural Council (fun fact of the day).

It's not just cherry harvests that are in question, though. Single-family residential housing is sputtering, much in part due to high interest rates, but also due to new regulations and codes that have builders asking more questions than answers are provided.

Perhaps even larger are the questions about energy sources for hydrogen. These questions have been raised since we first discussed a hydrogen facility in our region. Those questions are valid, and to this point, we've been waiting patiently to find out what the strategy might look like.

An article published by Capital Press on March 14 by Don Jenkins raises concerns about recent IRS decisions. The article states, "Tax rules proposed by the Biden administration will prevent hydrogen, a fuel that emits only water vapor when burned in engines, from gaining a major role powering the U.S. economy and reducing greenhouse gases, hydrogen advocates say."

The rules referenced concern what qualifies as "clean" or "green" hydrogen. Lawmakers left the details up to the IRS, and now they have posed draft rules that include, "hydrogen must be made from a renewable energy source, such as a wind or solar project, that went into operation within the past three years."

As is noted, this hinders the PNW significantly because hydro is not included by Washington as one of those "green" or "renewable" resources. Some would argue vehemently (myself included) that hydro should be included as one of the cleanest renewable sources in the land, but that doesn't fit the



**LUKE MOERKE**  
Chairman —  
Economic Alliance  
of Lewis County

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## First Mode announces strategic alliance to scale clean energy solutions for heavy industry with Mitsui & Co.

*Proving Grounds site in Centralia is testing a new Hybrid EV Retrofit mining vehicle*

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

First Mode, the pioneering developer and manufacturer of decarbonization products for heavy industry, announced a strategic alliance with Mitsui & Co., Ltd, the international trading company and investment group with extensive interests in the mining industry, to accelerate heavy industry's adoption of low-carbon and zero-emissions product solutions at scale.

First Mode operates a Proving Ground, or a test site, on the site of TransAlta's reclaimed mine in Centralia.

First Mode's considerable expertise in powertrain systems electrification and hydrogen technologies, coupled with Mitsui's global business network, will uniquely equip the alliance to explore new business opportunities into previously hard-to-abate sectors like mining, according to a news release.

"We are honored to enter into a strategic alliance with Mitsui to support and help scale our solutions that are proven to reduce heavy industry's polluting outputs. The collaboration underscores our shared commitment to sustainability and the



FIRST MODE

First Mode's new Hybrid EV (HEV) Retrofit is up and running for demonstration at the First Mode Proving Grounds at the Centralia TransAlta site. Their HEV Retrofit offers immediate fuel savings, up to 25% emissions reduction and no new infrastructure is required. First Mode recently formed an alliance with Mitsui, an international company with extensive interests in the mining industry.

critical role of partnerships when addressing complex global challenges through innovation," said Julian Soles, CEO of First Mode.

In mining, a typical heavy-haul truck burns about 1 million liters of diesel fuel

per year and remains in continuous operation for 10-15 years. Across First Mode's customer market, over 13,000 of these trucks are in global operation, releasing

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### SPONSORED CONTENT

## THURSTON-LEWIS-MASON CENTRAL LABOR COUNCIL

### Union Jobs Build Strong Communities

BY AFT WASHINGTON, AFL-CIO

Who develops the workforce?



#### THE UNION DIFFERENCE

AFT Washington is proud to represent the teachers and staff who are educating and

supporting the workforce of tomorrow, preparing them for good jobs. The union difference in pay and benefits gives workers the ability to build strong roots in their communities, and in turn, those communities thrive.

Our members are involved in many routes into the workforce. Apprenticeships give people the ability to learn highly skilled jobs while earning a salary; Community and Technical Colleges offer basic education, professional training and academic degrees; 4-year colleges and universities offer degrees and certifications. Every day, Washington's union educators are building the strong foundations that help our stu-

dents find their pathway into stable careers.

Unions make a real difference for our families, our communities, and our workers. And the answer to the question of who builds the workforce? Workers!





## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## Impact Washington partners with manufacturing businesses

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

Impact Washington, a member of the Economic Alliance of Lewis County, helps manufacturers excel in all areas of business, including developing new products, marketing existing products, hiring, retaining employees, finding ways to increase efficiency, decrease cost and waste and increasing sales growth.

Impact Washington is a non-profit organization with the mission to strengthen manufacturing in the state of Washington through public private partnership aimed to contribute to a healthy Washington economy.

Last year Impact Washington came to the Centralia College SWIFT Center in April and partnered with the Economic Alliance to put on a Growth Roadmap Workshop.

“They provide detailed ways to help manufacturing businesses grow and thrive,” said Alliance Executive Director Richard DeBolt. “We’ll partner with them again to bring the program back to Lewis County.”

Steve Capuano, account executive for Southwest Washington for Impact Washington, appreciates his partnership with the Alliance.

“They are helping us find clients in need in Lewis County,” he said. “It’s



Economic Alliance of Lewis County  
Steve Capuano from Impact Washington led a workshop in Centralia last April.

been fantastic — we consider the Alliance partners. Last year we got clients out of the workshop and we hope to do it again.”

Capuano said Impact Washington does not consider themselves consultants, but partners, helping manufacturing businesses become efficient, profitable, better places to work and assisting employees with career growth.



Economic Alliance of Lewis County  
Impact Washington came to Lewis County this past April to conduct a Growth Business Roadmap.



Visit all that Lewis County has to offer at [discoverlewiscounty.com](http://discoverlewiscounty.com).

## Discover Lewis County unveils bold strategic plan

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

Discover Lewis County is thrilled to announce the launch of its ambitious and forward-looking strategic plan, aimed at ensuring the continued growth, prosperity and enhancement of the region’s appeal for residents and visitors alike.

“As a premier destination in the beautiful state of Washington, Lewis County is renowned for its stunning natural landscapes and vibrant communities,” said Tourism Alliance of Lewis County Program Coordinator Lenee Langdon. “Discover Lewis County, the county’s official destination marketing organization, has developed this comprehensive strategic plan to build upon its successes and chart a dynamic course for the future.”

The strategic plan encompasses key objectives, including:

**Promotion of Lewis County as a premier destination:** Discover Lewis County will intensify efforts to market the county as a top-tier destination, highlighting its natural beauty, outdoor recreational opportunities, and vibrant communities. This will include innovative marketing campaigns, targeted outreach, and partnerships with local businesses and attractions.

**Enhanced visitor experience:** The plan emphasizes the enhancement of visitor experiences by creating a guide program for Lewis County, developing branded merchandise and fostering a welcoming atmosphere for guests. This will involve collaborations with local

heavy industries. Moreover, we will utilize our capabilities in renewable energy, green hydrogen, and hydrogen-derived synthetic fuels, along with our extensive network and investments in the clean energy sector, which includes batteries and hydrogen-related solutions like storage tanks. These efforts align with our commitment to a sustainable future,” said Ken Ito, General Manager of Mitsui’s Coal & Carbon Solution Division.

First Mode has been working in the mining sector since 2018, with successes that include developing the world’s first and largest hydrogen fuel cell electric truck. In 2023, First Mode launched its product line of diesel hybrid, battery electric, and next-generation hydrogen fuel cell drivetrains.

First Mode, a product innovation company headquartered in Seattle, with the proving grounds facility in Centralia, is working to eliminate mining’s carbon emissions and speed its transition to clean energy, according to a news release. First Mode’s outdoor work yard and redeveloped office space is located at the Trans-Alta Centralia Mine, now in the process of reclamation. Heavy-duty haul trucks for

to semantics, as decided by the ruling elites, but here we are. This has implications in the building industry as well, as builders and professionals involved in housing grapple with the most recent energy codes instituted in Washington.

This is your reminder that your vote matters, and we should be trying to educate those around us about how all of these decisions do have consequences (often unintended) so we need to keep thinking through things critically.

I can’t help but think that the recent



The website [discoverlewiscounty.com](http://discoverlewiscounty.com) is a comprehensive site to find that perfect getaway, such as Bear Lodge (pictured) near Mount Rainier, to that perfect restaurant, outdoors opportunities, events and places to play.

stakeholders to create memorable moments for visitors.

**Sustainable tourism practices:** Discover Lewis County is committed to responsible tourism. The plan outlines initiatives to minimize the environmental impact of tourism activities while promoting eco-friendly practices within the community.

**Support for local businesses:** The plan includes measures to support local businesses, from small shops to restaurants, lodging establishments, and service providers. By partnering with these businesses, Discover Lewis County aims to boost economic development and provide visitors with authentic, local experiences.

**Community engagement:** The strategic plan underscores the importance of engaging with local communities,

listening to their input, and involving them in tourism-related decisions. It aims to foster a sense of pride and ownership among residents regarding their role in promoting Lewis County.

“Discover Lewis County invites all community members, local businesses, and stakeholders to participate in this exciting journey toward a thriving and sustainable future,” Langdon said.

For more information about Discover Lewis County and its strategic plan, visit [discoverlewiscounty.com](http://discoverlewiscounty.com)

**About Discover Lewis County:** Discover Lewis County is the official destination marketing organization for Lewis County. Dedicated to promoting the county as a premier destination, Discover Lewis County works to attract visitors, enhance the local economy, and celebrate the unique culture and natural beauty of the region.

ture solutions. The site enables First Mode to better analyze the performance and operational effectiveness of their innovations in a true mining environment.

The establishment of a Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub in the Pacific Northwest was announced this past October — one of only seven in the nation — under a landmark new Department of Energy program funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Murray helped pass. The designation means that up to \$1 billion in federal funding will be going to the Pacific Northwest Hydrogen Association — a multi-state nonprofit coalition of public and private partners — to create a hydrogen network in the Pacific Northwest, called the Pacific Northwest Hydrogen Hub, to develop and bring to market clean hydrogen power solutions that can help meet the nation’s clean energy goals.

First Mode is a participant in the Pacific Northwest Hydrogen Hub and aims to use federal funds to support building hydrogen infrastructure at their proving grounds. Hydrogen Hub sub-awards are currently in negotiations with the Department of Energy.

myriad of interested off-takers. However, I don’t want it at the expense of rationality and reason.

I encourage anyone who cares about the economic future of our community to lean on your representatives to urge the IRS to amend their proposed rules. Or, perhaps if the governor really cares about viable alternative fuel sources in our region, he will declare hydro energy renewable, so that it can be used for clean energy storage, like hydrogen, utilizing current inefficiencies in our systems.

Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council decision on an energy farm proposed near Tri-Cities has something to do with all of this. I don’t live in Tri-Cities, so an energy farm doesn’t sound too bad, but if they wanted to put over 200 wind turbines and 5,000 acres of solar panels in Lewis County, I think I know what I’d say to that, and it wouldn’t be nice.

I still think a hydrogen facility would benefit Lewis County and would help to attract high-level jobs, new technology, and would spur on other industries with a

### FIRST MODE:

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35 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually — the equivalent emissions of 8 million passenger cars per year.

To help the sector achieve its goal of 85-100% emissions reduction by 2050, First Mode’s product line begins with a low-risk hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) retrofit that requires no infrastructure changes and uses regenerative braking to decrease truck fuel use and carbon emissions by up to 25%. From there, the HEV’s interoperable “feed forward” design enables mining companies to complete their fleet conversion to zero-emissions using First Mode’s full battery or next-generation hydrogen fuel cell EV drivetrains at a pace and timeline that they control.

“Mitsui recognizes First Mode as a pioneer in decarbonization solutions for the mining sector, particularly in the replacement of diesel fuel. Our relationship with them dates back to 2020, when we first explored the possibility of testing their early-stage fuel cell innovation at one of our mine sites. As such, we are eager to support their growth by leveraging our presence in the mining, mobility, and other

### CHAIR:

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narrative of our current governor.

If we could count hydro as clean and renewable, then the state would not have the arguments needed to deploy programs like cap and trade, which jack our gas tax and make it so that we have some of the highest fuel costs in all the land. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the viability of a new energy sector comes down





Economic Alliance of Lewis County

Prospective employees mull through the booths at the Inclusive Fair on Thursday.



Economic Alliance of Lewis County

A full house attended Thursday's Inclusive Fair on the campus of Centralia College.

# Inclusive Fair a success with strong attendance

*Thursday's event matched employers with employees*

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The 2nd Annual Inclusive Career Fair on Thursday, hosted by Cultivating Inclusion Lewis County, The Economic Alliance of Lewis County and Lewis County Autism Coalition, attracted 26 employers and 207 attendees.

"This event is important to this community, and I was floored by the attendance both by employers and potential employees," said Economic Alliance Exec-

utive Director Richard DeBolt. "This can only make our community stronger and more vibrant."

This event was held from noon to 3 p.m. on Thursday, April 25, at Centralia College in the TransAlta Commons. The event was free and open to the public. They held a supportive employment presentation prior to the event for participating employers and resources organizations to gain knowledge and assist them with information needed for the career fair.

Businesses from multiple industries and trades were on site to meet with attendees, with job seekers visiting the various resource booths.

This event was geared toward community members with disabilities and differences. Employers that attended joined the event with that knowledge in mind. Veterans were welcomed, particularly disabled veterans, as were English as a second language citizens, and individuals who may have struggled with the traditional hiring process.

Students were also welcome to attend, with an emphasis on individuals who are neurodiverse, have developmental disabilities or differences, high school students with an IEP or a 504 plan, and anyone who has had difficulty accessing employment through the typical

application process.

Aa great team of community partners engaged in the Inclusive Career Fair as sponsors.

"A big thank you to the Autism Coalition Lewis County, WSECU, Neurodiverse Connections, Centralia College Mobile CDL Lab/Classroom and Lewis County and to all of the volunteers who assisted in making our event a success," said Economic Alliance Business Development Center/Program Manager Dolly Tardiff. "Our Inclusive Career Fair has a positive impact in schools, work, and our community. We will continue to provide this event year after year."

## PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT

**HAMILTON**  
COMMERCIAL LEASE  
ZONED GENERAL COMMERCIAL, LIGHT INDUSTRIAL | MANUFACTURING | WAREHOUSE

11,250 SQ FT - 202,500 SQ FT

**PROPERTY FEATURES**

- 500KVA 277/480-VOLT 3PHASE POWER, EXPANDABLE
- 12 DRIVE-IN BAYS
- 14" WIDE x 15" TALL ROLL UP DOORS
- 150' WIDE x 450' LONG CLEAR SPAN BUILDING, 22 FT EVE HEIGHT
- AVAILABLE FIBRE
- FULLY INSULATED
- PERIMETER SECURITY FENCING
- IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO I-5
- LARGE PARKING AREA TO INCLUDE 150 STALLS PER BUILDING
- NEW CONSTRUCTION / NNN

CONTACT: Rusty Gill, 360-508-1129, Rusty@brplc.com  
SITE ADDRESS: 211 Hamilton Rd N, Chehalis, WA 98532

For information on this property and others available throughout Lewis County (or to list your industrial/commercial property for sale), contact Economic Alliance of Lewis County External Relations Manager Eric Sonnenberg at [eric@lewiscountyalliance.org](mailto:eric@lewiscountyalliance.org) or 208-206-5407



**ERIC SONNENBERG**  
Economic Alliance of Lewis County External Relations Manager

## CENTER:

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with such items as finding the perfect name for a business, and wading through the paperwork needed by the Department of Revenue, L&I, the Secretary of State and Employment Security. Need to build a website? The BEC can help.

Tardiff received a call last week from a man who was transitioning out of the military. The military did everything for him.

"He didn't know how to find a job, the military did everything for him. He didn't know where to start, saying interviews via Zoom were impossible for him," Tardiff said.

Tardiff said helping him made her day, and she'll be able to do that with more resources through the BEC.

"He was the sweetest man," she said. "This Business Equity Center is pretty dang exciting."

The BEC seeks to provide a comprehensive support network for current and future business owners, removing deterrents for all community members to have equitable access to success.

"The Alliance believes that increasing access and opportunities will change the landscape of our community," said Alliance Executive Director Richard DeBolt. "Dolly's excited and so am I. It's what an economic development group should be doing — helping people grow in business, and Dolly is the perfect person to head this up."

## Tardiff's background

Tardiff was born at Madigan Hospital in Tacoma and spent her formative years in Lacey. She developed a strong sense of community and a drive to make a difference in the world around her. She is the proud mother of two adult children, Cierra and Connor who both reside in Chehalis.

In 1990, Tardiff made the pivotal decision to relocate to Centralia, where she would later settle in Chehalis in 2001. These moves marked significant chapters

in her life, providing her with new opportunities to explore and contribute.

With a passion for business management and an eye for opportunity, Tardiff founded Western Washington Merchant Patrol, Inc. in 1992. As the president and founder, she has steered the company toward becoming a pillar of the community, offering a wide range of security services to businesses and organizations across the region. From retail stores to biodiesel plants, her company stands as a steadfast guardian, ensuring the safety and security of her clients.

Tardiff's commitment to her community extends beyond her role in business. For 14-plus years she worked for Safeway as a checker working her way into a management position. She also served as the manager of the Centralia Chehalis Chamber of Commerce, where she played a vital role in organizing events and managing day-to-day operations. Her dedication to fostering economic growth and community engagement earned her a reputation as a respected leader in the area.

Currently, Tardiff holds the position of program manager at the Economic Alliance of Lewis County, overseeing the Business Development Center. In this role, she works tirelessly to support local entrepreneurs, providing them with resources and guidance. Through innovative programs and strategic partnerships, she champions economic growth and workforce development, ensuring a brighter future for Lewis County.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Tardiff is deeply involved in her community, volunteering her time and expertise to various boards and organizations. She serves on the Industrial Commission Board and the Centralia Community Foundation Board, where she continues to make a positive impact on the lives of those around her.

"Dolly is an inspiration," DeBolt said. "Her unwavering dedication to her community and her tireless efforts to build a brighter future are a testament to her positive, get-it-done spirit blended with care for those around her."

## ECONOMIC ALLIANCE BOARD & STAFF

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