

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

It's the economy, stupid, or is it?

Initiatives in this coming election need to be pondered

BY LUKE MOERKE

Economic Alliance of Lewis County

Here we are on the eve of a major election and there are the usual smear tactics being used for various campaigns.

I'm sure many of you tire, like I do, of all the character bashing that goes on. You see wild claims made in mailers and hear about them on the radio. As for me, I think it goes back to the quippy political slogan of the Clinton campaign in the early '90s, "It's the economy, stupid." Coined by Democratic political strategist Jim Carville, the statement rings true, and the Economic Alliance is working to that end.



The Economic Alliance has been and will continue to be committed to recruiting businesses to our area that will bolster our local economy with quality jobs and wages. This in turn drives up the demand for housing and services for any entering our area.

There is no doubt that building and construction in general are major drivers of our local economy. In addition to recruiting solid businesses, we also seek to retain businesses who currently operate in our area. This can look like helping a business find property or a new building for expansion. It could be aligning them with quality training entities. Whatever the need, the Alliance is here to help with that in any way we can.

Classes and training will be commencing this coming year in our new location next to Fiddlers Coffee in Centralia. We are excited to see how this new location will be a benefit to people in our area for job retraining, helping with starting a business, or for organizing minority business leaders to help solve issues in their employment fields. I'm glad to say that these things are either being done already or are in the works currently.

I believe things like job creation, retention and recruitment help our local economy. Of course we want that locally, but we too are affected by the national political scene and economy. We can be insulated a bit in our region, and we have thanks to give for the many solid leaders we have at the city, county and state level. Our local representatives do well for our county.

That said, I believe policy should drive the decisions we make. In addition to the slogan coined by Jim Carville, the quote from Ronald Reagan in the 1980s is worth pondering as well: "I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Why does this cause the recoil that we feel from that statement? Because most of us have had the pleasure of that kind of government "help" and we don't want it.

So, in addition to the economy as a major consideration this November, consider the help factor, and who might improve or worsen that situation for us as Americans.

Here in Washington, we are battling some of this with initiatives this year. The state's climate commitment is bent on forcing homeowners and business owners out of clean and inexpensive energy options like natural gas. This has been pushed by many of our state's upper echelon of governing individuals.

Initiative 2066 seeks to keep energy choice an option. The state should not be encouraging utility companies like Puget Sound Energy to discontinue gas service to customers who choose to use it.

As another economic item, how about those gas and diesel prices this year? Wondering why everything costs so much more for us in Washington? Well, how about the \$.43 gas and \$.53 diesel price increases, courtesy of the Climate Commitment Act? Want to repeal those increases? Vote yes on Initiative 2117.

Where will the millions collected for the cap and invest be spent, and on what? More EV stations? Do you

SEE CHAIR, PAGE B3

REGIONAL ECONOMIC FORECAST & INNOVATION

EXPO



EXPO features region's economic groups

Yearly event is set for Dec. 5 at Great Wolf Lodge

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The Economic Alliance of Lewis County is one of five regional economic groups to participate in the Regional Economic Forecast and Innovation EXPO at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound on Thursday, Dec. 5.

The eight-hour event is put on by the Thurston Economic Development Council and Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council.

If you pick only one conference to attend in the Pacific Northwest, choose the 2024 EXPO to learn where our local economy is headed, network with "Who's Who" in our surround-

ing five-county region, and acquire new skills to take your business to the next level.

Although this highly anticipated gathering is sold out, those wishing for a last-minute ticket are encouraged to call the Thurston Economic Development Council at 360-464-6040 or email hhouse@thurstonedc.com.

New Market Skills Center Executive Director Matt Ishler believes the EXPO is extremely worthy. New Market is a consortium of 12 school districts including Adna, Centralia, Napavine, North Thurston, Oakville, Olympia, Rainier, Rochester, Shelton, Tenino, Tumwater and Yelm.

"What a great event to bring regional stakeholders together to network, learn from one another,

and be exposed to insightful economic data," Ishler said. I've made connections that have already opened doors for collaboration between my organization and others."

About the EXPO

The five-county region's economic development groups, Greater Grays Harbor, Inc., Economic Alliance of Lewis County, Economic Development Council of Mason County, Pacific County Economic Development Council and the Thurston Economic Development Council, will be convening to showcase emerging economic sectors. The EXPO is excited to share stories that interweave the primary

SEE EXPO, PAGE B3



BRANDI KRUSE COURTESY PHOTO

Brandi Kruse is the keynote speaker for the Feb. 7 Economic Alliance of Lewis County's Annual Banquet at the Jesters Event Center. Here she is pictured at the capitol in Olympia in support of police pursuit legislation this past March.

Brandi Kruse Is keynote speaker for Alliance banquet

Kruse returns to offer her take on today's politics; you can listen to her podcast [un]Divided online

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

Former broadcast reporter and now political podcaster Brandi Kruse returns as the guest speaker for The Economic Alliance of Lewis County's Annual Banquet set for Feb. 7 at the Jester Auto Museum and Event Center in Chehalis.

Kruse was a Seattle-based reporter who worked for Q13 FOX. Several years ago she quit after a disagreement with the future of her popular show with management.

Today Kruse is an independent journalist with her podcast [un]Divided. She left Q13 and her popular political television show "The Divide with Brandi Kruse," a talk show she hosted starting

in the summer of 2019.

"I actually loved working for Fox during the pandemic. They treated us very well as a corporation," said Kruse. "When it became clear The Divide, a show I created, wasn't going to move forward, which was a decision I did not agree with, I knew I was going to have to leave."

"I came to the conclusion that if I wanted to do my best work — my best work for the public — I didn't believe I could work for corporate media and work for the public at the same time," she told Seattle's KIRO Radio.

"I knew that I couldn't do the kind of journalism that I wanted to do," she said.

She shifted platforms, and turned her independent journalism up a notch.

"If I couldn't do it there (KCPQ 13), I decided I was going to do it on my own," she said.

Today you can subscribe and listen

to "[un]Divided with Brandi Kruse" at [www.patreon.com/undivided](http://www.patreon.com/undivided).

"As a journalist in Seattle for more than a decade, I've witnessed what it looks like when those in power put on performances in lieu of being productive," she said on a past podcast. "In a state with one-party rule, our divides here are less between red and blue than between the reasonable and unreasonable. On [un]Divided, we encourage leaders to look past partisan politics long enough to live up to their obligations. We reject fringe ideologies and give a voice to the majority of Americans who are tired of being drowned out."

"I quit my job in corporate media to start a platform where I could be unfiltered, unrelenting, and honest. Too much is at stake to hold back. I can't continue to do this work without your support," she said. "Together, we can

SEE KRUSE, PAGE B3



# Discover White Pass Scenic Byway with #TheWanderingQueen

BY LENE LANGDON  
Tourism Alliance Project Coordinator

This October, Discover Lewis County and the White Pass Scenic Byway were highlighted by popular travel influencer #TheWanderingQueen (Michelle Stelly), who explored the area's natural beauty and small-town charm with her family.

Known for her outdoor adventure content and breathtaking photography, #TheWanderingQueen shared her experiences with her large Instagram following, offering a fresh look at the stunning landscapes of Southwest Washington.

## A scenic journey through the byway

Michelle and her family arrived in Chehalis on Oct. 4, kicking off their visit with accommodations at the Holiday Inn Express & Suites and dinner at The Shire in Centralia. Her trip took her along the White Pass Scenic Byway, a 124-mile stretch that connects the stunning views of Mount Rainier, Mount St. Helens and Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

The family took time to explore iconic spots like Rainbow Falls State Park, where Michelle shared pictures of the misty waterfalls and the serene beauty of the Chehalis River, captivating her audience with the natural splendor of the area.

From cozy breakfasts at Shona's Food Company to a farm-to-table lunch at Jeremy's Farm to Table, Michelle highlighted Lewis County's local culinary offerings. Her posts emphasized the welcoming, small-town feel of places like Doty General Store, which has been a community hub for

decades, and quaint eateries like Blue Stone Cafe in Randle.

In Packwood, Michelle stayed at Hotel Packwood, capturing its charming boutique feel and sharing her experiences hiking nearby trails like the Silver Falls Loop Trail, where she documented her family's trek through old-growth forests alongside the rushing Ohanapecoh River.

One of the highlights of the trip was a visit to Woods Creek Wildlife Trail near Randle, where the family enjoyed wildlife viewing and scenic overlooks. Michelle's posts emphasized the peaceful and accessible nature of the area, ideal for families looking for outdoor adventures.

Her audience responded enthusiastically to the posts, with many commenting on the hidden gems that Lewis County offers to travelers seeking an authentic Pacific Northwest experience.

Michelle's visit generated buzz across social media, helping to raise awareness about the White Pass Scenic Byway and the surrounding areas. Discover Lewis County's collaboration with the influencer aligns with their goal of promoting the region as a destination for eco-tourism, outdoor recreation and local experiences.

Michelle's posts and stories have already garnered thousands of views, boosting the visibility of the region. Her influence is expected to draw new visitors to the area, looking to explore the scenic drives, hiking trails, and charming towns that make Lewis County a unique travel destination.

Discover Lewis County hopes that the exposure from #TheWanderingQueen's visit will inspire more travelers to explore this less-traveled corner of Washington. With its rich history, abundant wildlife and awe-



MICHELLE STELLY / #THEWANDERINGQUEEN

Myrtle Falls, located in the Mount Rainier area.

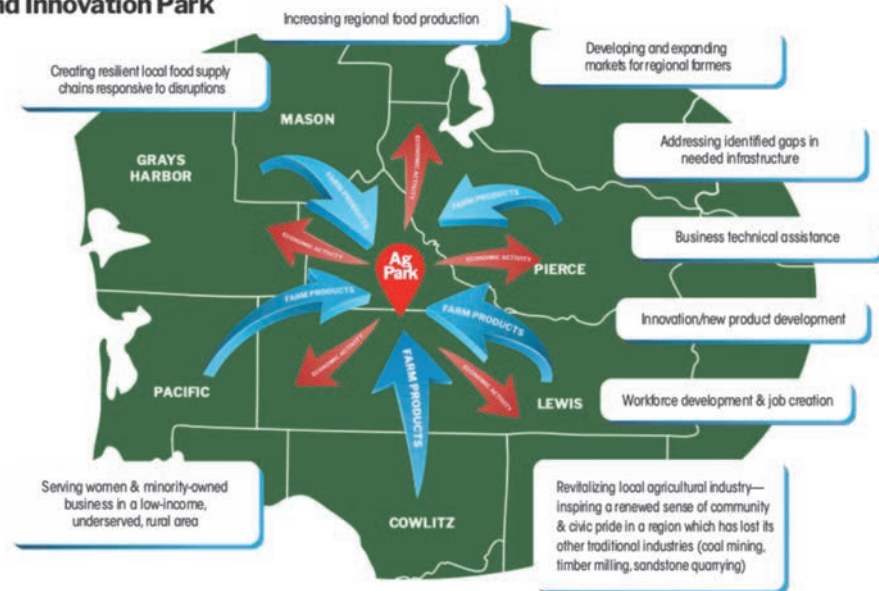
inspiring views, the White Pass Scenic Byway is poised to become a must-see destination for nature lovers and adventure seekers alike.

As the region continues to promote

sustainable tourism, collaborations with influencers like #TheWanderingQueen play a crucial role in showcasing the beauty and potential of Lewis County.



## Southwest Washington Agricultural Business and Innovation Park



# Tenino regional ag park to open in early 2025

*A hub for business, innovation and community growth about to flower*

BY THE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY

The Southwest Washington Agricultural Innovation Park, also known as the "Tenino Ag Park," is set to open to the public in early 2025.

This groundbreaking multi-tenant business park, focused on agriculture and food-related enterprises, will be a game-changer for agri-tourism in Tenino and beyond. It will feature the Stone City Event Center, a cutting-edge hospitality and training facility, along with Simply Organics Café and Catering, owned by Tenino locals Bryce and Kate Hughes.

The park will also welcome Hot-Babe HotSauce, a local food manufacturer, along with Colvin Ranch Provisions, a new venture from the 170-year-old generational Colvin Ranch, which will feature a local meat counter and a charming general store.

On the innovation front, Dragonwheel Investment Group will bring high-paying jobs and hometown pride as a global leader in designing aerial transport systems.

The Thurston County Economic Development Council will also have a presence at the park, with a rural outpost of its Center for Business & Innovation, providing vital business support to small businesses in the region.



Artist's Rendering

An artist's rendition of the Tenino Ag Park.

## About the park

The Southwest Washington Regional Agricultural Business & Innovation Park is an Integrated multi-tenant business park focused on value-added, agricultural/food-related enterprises, including a state of the art hospitality event center and business resource and innovation hub located within the city of Tenino on a 13-acre site.

The site will accommodate 160,000-plus square feet of building space for processing, production, distribution and office space, and retail/tourism-related uses, with an emphasis on agriculture-related manufacturing, pro-

cessing, packaging and storage.

The park concentrates multiple technical business service providers in one location to serve rural and agriculture-based businesses throughout the region.

The park was created with the coordinated support of over 40 partner organizations, with consideration of the agricultural needs of the entire Southwest Washington region.

## The park will:

- Be a permanent hub for agriculture and rural business
- Expand existing and develop new markets for agricultural goods

- Increase regional production of value-added food products
- Increase the viability of regional food and farm businesses
- Drive the success of existing, and creation of new, local businesses
- Provide educational, research, event and tourism opportunities
- Address identified regional infrastructure gaps and distribution needs

Interested in locating your ag business at the park? Want additional information?

Contact Aslan Meade: 360-464-6054 | ameade@thurstonedc.com



**EXPO:**

*Continued From Page B1*

and emerging sectors together into one robust economic fabric.

Experts on the state of the economy from each of the surrounding five counties will be on hand to share their knowledge and beyond.

Head to the Main Stage at this year's Regional Economic Forecast and Innovation EXPO to hear from the presidents of our region's leading colleges — Centralia College, South Puget Sound Community College, Grays Harbor College and Olympic College — as they dive into innovative workforce development strategies designed to meet today's business challenges head-on.

This year's focus: How regional colleges are equipping the workforce of tomorrow to thrive in emerging sectors, navigate workforce shifts, and harness the potential of AI — all while ensuring diversity and inclusivity in an evolving economy.

This highly anticipated networking event attracts over 350-plus key decision-makers, community leaders, and innovators from across various indus-

tries in Thurston, Mason, Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Pacific counties, along with participants from surrounding areas.

The conference brings together businesses from multiple industry sectors, as well as leaders from non-profit organizations, education and the public sector. Exhibitors will showcase cutting-edge technology, products and innovations. Attendees can network, attend breakout sessions and gain insights from a regional economic forecast.

An economic development leaders panel, including Alliance Executive Director Richard DeBolt, will present solutions and strategies that businesses can use in the planning and operation of their business, and how to build a strong, resilient and inclusive community.

Breakout sessions will focus on the very real issues and opportunities facing our five county region — first and foremost among these — the needs for workforce and housing.

A strong focus will also be placed on how policy is affecting small business success, and how better awareness and information (including op-

**Regional College Panel:  
Driving Innovative Workforce  
Development for Future Economies**

REGIONAL ECONOMIC  
FORECAST & INNOVATION  
**EXPO**  
DECEMBER 5, 2024



CENTRALIA COLLEGE  
**Bob Mohrbacher**



SOUTH PUGET SOUND  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
**Tim Stokes**



GRAYS HARBOR  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
**Dr. Carli Schiffner**



OLYMPIC COLLEGE  
**Marty Cavalluzzi**

timal data) can provide an advantage. Additional breakouts will focus on telework, extending rural broadband networks and building regional-scale supply chains to assist with resiliency in the face of economic disruptions.

Intent will also be given to how diversity, equity and inclusion are

woven into these themes/innovations. Showcasing the actual leaders in the region addressing these issues, the sessions will approach topics in engaging, enlightening and fun ways.

...  
*The EXPO is from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Cost is \$100.*

**CHAIR:**

*Continued From Page B1*

trust our state to spend that wisely? Oh, and we won't have enough electricity to charge all the cars, because we closed down natural

gas plants that produce inexpensive electricity as well. Nice.

Do we want rolling blackouts in the winters because all the investments into wind and solar can't produce in our cold dark winters? These are the things we should be

asking and demanding answers from our politicians. Do we need more energy? Yes. Should we diversify, OK. How about reliable and inexpensive means though.

Please think, please vote. Your local races really are more important

than you might imagine. May the Lord give us wisdom in days that lack sense and reason from many.

...  
*Luke Moerke is the board chair for the Economic Alliance of Lewis County and owner of Exodus Engineering.*

**KRUSE:**

*Continued From Page B1*

give common sense a comeback."

In describing her podcast, she told listeners, "[un]Divided is more than a place to talk politics, it is a mission. The fact that you are here reflects your commitment to bridging the divide in our communities."

She said since leaving mainstream media, she enjoys opportunities such as

the upcoming Alliance banquet keynote speech where she can freely share her political opinions.

**Banquet details**

- 6 p.m. social hour/silent auction
- 7 p.m. dinner and program
- No host bar (cash only) by the Shire \$85 per person; VIP table of eight for \$1,000 with logo promotion
- Call Dolly for tickets at 360-748-0114

**INDUSTRIAL - PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT**

Bishop Rd, Chehalis • \$8.4 Million

**33.66 ACRES  
CLOSE ACCESS TO I-5**

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



**Annual Banquet**  
ECONOMIC ALLIANCE OF LEWIS COUNTY  
Feb 7th, 2025

- \* At Testers Auto Museum
- \* 6pm Social hour / Silent Auction
- \* 7pm Dinner & Program
- \* No host bar (Cash Only) by the Shire
- \* Tickets: \$85 per person
- \* VIP - Table (8) \$1000.00 w/logo promotion
- \* Call Dolly for tickets 360-748-0114

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