

Why local matters

“Social capital provides the glue which facilitates co-operation, exchange and innovation.”

— *The New Economy: Beyond the Hype*
“The Chamber shall strengthen the identity and enhance the image of our business community.”

— *Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce vision statement*

It's important for the reader to remember these numbers for later reference:

- 30.2 million
- 99.9%
- less than 500

Last October, Lori Arce-Torres, executive director of the Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce, and I met at Chinook Winds Casino Resort for a half-hour interview on her radio show.

It was her once-a-week venue to interview business owners, local movers and shakers, and blokes like me — talking about my work heading up an anti-

poverty program in Lincoln County, Family Independence Initiative.

I've been “doing journalism” for a long time: since my late teens in Arizona. I've had my own radio show. I've won press awards for my newspaper and magazine writing.

Lori does a fine job laying down questions to get to the heart of the initiative I am helping the State of Oregon head up in order to determine the reality of working and struggling families in our county from their point of view. She gets into background questions, and looks for context not only for the project I am involved with, but also dives into my own narrative.

Social IQ

In one very elegant sense, Lori Arce-Torres is establishing yet another layer of her own social capital network — the very essence of how communities and individuals weather the storm of a tough economy and limited resources.

One might say Lori is all about social capital as the head of the Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce.

She has only been at the helm of the chamber for three years, but her life —



Lori with the 2019 Angels' Ball Tree, “Be An Earth Angel” crafted by Lovell's Burlworks from recycled materials.

starting out in Blackfoot, Idaho, 56 years ago, to today — is defined by real-world links between groups and individuals. Her networking acumen — with friends, family networks, networks of former colleagues and so on — must have been front and center of how she landed the job in November 2016.

If there's anything easy to understand about a small-town chamber it is how its unstated goal is to foster a divergent business community, which in turn creates shared norms, values and understandings in order to support local businesses.

Lori and talk about the relationship of businesses to their workers and, of course, how consumers — who make up the third leg of the “enterprise stool” — are the engine driving a successful business.

Back to the numbers

Lori shows me the carving (Lovell's Burlworks) of the chamber's tree for the Angels Anonymous event held on Dec. 8. The artwork is amazingly intricate but solid — a wood carving depicting “angel's wings growing out of a twisted trunk.”

“The idea is people will take selfies in front of it,” she said, “acting as the trunk to the wings. Our chamber tree is around the theme, be an earth angel: Reduce, Reuse, Rejoice.”

The event in question, The Angels' Ball, is an \$85-a-ticket black tie auction to serve the poor in Lincoln City.

The idea is to help people in our

community in need by raising money from dozens of business participants with their own unique themes. Some of the gifts under the chamber's carving will be live plants and ornaments designed and made by 4th grade students at Sam Case — all from recycled materials.

Okay, back to those numbers: In the US, there are more than 30.2 million small businesses with 500 or fewer employees comprising 99.9 percent of all businesses.

Don't think Amazon, Walmart or McDonald's — but rather imagine all those hotels, restaurants and standalone businesses, including those in strip malls, providing goods and services to the very people who make Lincoln City tick.

Supporting local businesses in turn strengthens the very fabric of a community through relationships with families dependent upon work. This in turn weaves a cultural, educational, recreational and spiritual web that we all hope envelopes our community in the form of public health, safety and well-being.

The idea behind a group of 300 business members with the chamber — all dues-paying participants — is to facilitate both networking opportunities and hands-on economic development. The very thread of how well these small businesses do is predicated on the well-being of their employees, Lori emphasizes.

Interestingly, when I ask her what she



Lori with the 1982 El Camino she and husband Joey are bringing back to life

wanted to be when she was growing up, first she said, “a singer . . . Barbara Streisand was my mom's favorite.” But then as she got older growing up on a farm near Idaho Falls, she decided, “I sort of like the idea of being an activities director for a nursing home.”

She ended up regularly visiting her father who was in a nursing home for Alzheimer's patients for eight years before he died.

Now fast forward — we are talking about the three legs to the other stool challenging young and not-so-old workers and families in Lincoln City: lack of affordable housing, lack of day care and lack of things to do.

One of the initiatives Lori is undertaking is studying the idea of siting day care facilities inside nursing facilities and retirement homes: “It's good for the residents to be around these young children, and it helps our struggling families continue to go to work and stay here.”

She's quick to point out how the chamber is always evolving to support different businesses. She also professes how millennials are not big into going to meetings. So new tools are being developed to lure more members and to gauge their businesses' needs and wants.

For now, though, her husband Joey (from Puerto Rico), their 19-year-old track athlete son Gabe (at Western Oregon University), their two daughters Kandis (34, in McKinleyville, California) and Kamile, 32 (in Cloverdale), and now two recent additions — grandchildren — will continue to grow Lori's social capital we have in the form of family and friends.

The reader can tune into Lori interviewing her own social capital network, “Chamber Chat,” on Monday mornings from 8:30 to 9 am on KBCH-1400 AM.

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Read on, as Deep Dive continues at www.oregoncoasttoday.com.

Paul Haeder is a writer living and working in Lincoln County. He has two books coming out, one a short story collection, “Wide Open Eyes: Surfacing from Vietnam,” and a non-fiction book, “No More Messing Around: The Good, Bad and Ugly of America's Education System.”