

Columbia County forms new economic development team

Bright spots can be hard to find in today's economy. Fortunately, the Columbia County Economic Team is now actively working to fix that through a new local partnership for economic development.

The organization officially launched on October 1 when its board of directors met for the first time. It was the beginning of what is likely to be a long-term initiative geared towards making Columbia County more productive and competitive for community-sustaining businesses.

In turn, the organization hopes its efforts will yield more employment opportunities, a larger tax base, better infrastructure, and more vital communities, overall.

David Stocker, executive director for the Columbia County Economic Team, explained, "this organization wants to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for all communities in Columbia County." He added, "We know that none of us can do it alone, which is why elected officials and many business leaders throughout the county have embraced a team approach."

In fact, each of Columbia County's communities is represented on the organization's board of directors, plus representatives from the Columbia County Board of Commission-

ers, the Port of St. Helens, public utility districts, and Portland Community College.

Representatives from a dozen businesses operating in the county also sit on the board, bringing essential private sector insight on how best to strengthen Columbia County's business climate.

Tony Hyde, Columbia County Commissioner and a member of the Columbia County Economic Team's Board of Directors remarked, "I'm excited to see all of Columbia County working together as a team with a common goal of creating jobs and improving our local economy."

If the organization's big picture goals are ambitious, its day-to-day work is expected to create tangible results for individual businesses and, by extension, their employees.

The organization is now planning what services it will offer to businesses already located in the county — to keep them local and support their growth — while also launching a campaign to encourage new businesses to consider the advantages of operating in Columbia County.

With the Columbia County Economic Team now launched, community and business leaders are confident that county residents will begin seeing economic bright spots everywhere.

Find marine trade schools online

For anyone who has thought about a career in the marine trades — as a boatbuilder, designer or marine technician — there's a world of top-notch one- and two-year technical programs available. To help examine the possibilities of a career working in and around recreational boats, BoatUS has added a new list of marine trade schools, community colleges and accredited certification programs to the Guide to Marine Education Programs at www.BoatUS.com/colleges.

The addition of one- and two-year technical programs to BoatUS' previously-released Guide to Marine Education offering (four-year) college and university marine programs, makes learning about educa-

tional opportunities easier by having all of the information in one place.

Whether you're just out of high school or looking to start a new boating-related career, you can search the Guide by state or specific focus area, such as marine science, boat design, engine repair, fisheries, oceanography, marine engineering or biology. Only US-accredited post-secondary schools are included. Scholarship information is also offered.

An additional resource is "The Boat Lovers' Guide to Marine Trade Schools," which premieres in the October/November issue of BoatUS Magazine and can be found online at www.BoatUSMagazine.com/boatmag/20101011#pg50

Public dissatisfaction shows urgent need for reform

From Page 1

Oregon's Public Records Law. Accordingly, he launched a systematic review to identify weak points and suggest improvements. Those improvements will be part of an ambitious government transparency package that will be introduced in the 2011 legislative session.

In addition to conducting a thorough review of state and federal sunshine laws, the Attorney General sponsored six public meetings across Oregon to gather suggestions for improving transparency from the public, government officials and

the media. The conclusion was clear: Oregon's law is clogged with hundreds of confusing exemptions, and requests for records are often met with high fee requirements and long delays.

The meetings were co-sponsored by the Oregon Department of Justice and the Oregon Newspaper Publishers' Association.

During this process, the Attorney General received hundreds of suggestions and comments. Most of the comments relate to four areas of concern: timelines for responding to pub-

lic records requests; fees; exemptions; and public meetings.

The purpose of this report is to catalogue the most pressing problems with Oregon's public records and public meetings laws and highlight some potential solutions. By noting the vast public dissatisfaction with the law, the report points to an urgency for reform. The report also demonstrates that neither the public seeking access to open government nor the agencies responsible for delivering it are happy with the status quo.

Funds arrive to help Oregonians avoid foreclosure

Senator Jeff Merkley announced that the U.S. Department of Treasury has awarded an additional \$82 million to the Oregon Housing Finance Agency for the Hardest Hit Fund program. This brings a total of \$220 million in federal assistance to Oregon for foreclosure-prevention assistance.

"The only way we are going to get our economy back on track is to address the foreclosure crisis that is crippling families across Oregon," said Merkley. "This will help keep families in their homes."

The fund is provided to states hit hard by the economic and housing market downturn,

so they can implement programs to meet the local challenges homeowners are facing.

Oregon's state housing agency has flexibility in how to use the additional funds, but expects a program to be available in January 2011. Under the Hardest Hit Fund, states are already working to implement a variety of targeted programs to help struggling homeowners, including assistance to help unemployed homeowners pay their monthly mortgage; reinstatement assistance to bring delinquent homeowners current on their mortgage; principal reduction for homeowners who are underwater; assis-

tance with second liens; facilitation of short sales; and relocation assistance for families that cannot stay in their home.


Builders, suppliers meeting, 4-6 p.m.


Today, October 21, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. representatives from P&C Construction will be available to meet with local firms and individuals interested in opportunities to provide construction services and supplies on the St. Helens Transit Facility project.

The meeting will be held at Columbia County Courthouse, 230 Strand Street, St. Helens.

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