

KITSAP

March 2025

# BUSINESS

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Turning a Chocolate Company's Crisis into a Mission

From Fitness Struggle to Success Story

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# W

elcome to the inaugural edition of Kitsap Business, a new publication dedicated to telling

the stories of innovation, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit that define our business community.

I'm proud to announce our partnership with both the Greater Kitsap Chamber and the South Kitsap Chamber of Commerce. As part of this collaboration, all active members of both chambers will receive Kitsap Business as a benefit of their membership. Inside, you'll find detailed coverage of upcoming events and initiatives from both chambers, ensuring you stay connected with valuable networking and growth opportunities.

The stories in this issue paint a vivid picture of what makes our business community special. From Peter Crabtree's bold leadership in transforming a crisis into an opportunity for industry-wide change at L'Atelier TR, to Olympic College's ambitious \$10.5 million investment in healthcare education, we're seeing how local leaders are tackling significant challenges head-on.

These stories share a common thread: the power of vision and commitment to community. Take Brett Clark of BC Fitness, who transformed his personal struggles with fitness into a thriving business that creates safe spaces for others on similar journeys. Or Alanna Imbach, whose international experience led her to create Vibe Coworks and Matchstick Lab, fostering a new kind of entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kitsap County.

What strikes me most about these narratives is how they exemplify the innovative spirit of our region. Whether it's Olympic College's practical approach to addressing the healthcare worker shortage, or BC Fitness's reimagining of what a gym can be, our local entrepreneurs and institutions are finding creative solutions to real community needs.

In launching Kitsap Business, our goal is to spotlight these stories of transformation and growth, while providing practical insights and connections that help your



business thrive. We believe that by sharing these stories, we strengthen the fabric of our business community and inspire the next generation of local entrepreneurs.

This magazine represents more than just business news—it's a platform for connection, learning, and celebration of our vibrant business community. As we move forward, we invite you to be part of this journey. Share your stories, your challenges, and your successes. Together, we can

showcase the incredible spirit of enterprise that makes Kitsap County such a special place to do business.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting new venture. Here's to telling the stories that matter, fostering connections that last, and building a stronger business community together. ■

**Terry Ward**  
Publisher, Kitsap Business

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## KITSAP BUSINESS

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## Feature

# From Scandal to Social Change:

When sexual harassment occurs in the workplace, companies often work to keep it quiet to protect their image and bottom line.

**By Quinn Propst |**  
Ward Media Staff Reporter

**B**ut when Peter Crabtree learned of sexual harassment in his chocolate company, L'Atelier TR (LTR), he made a bold decision: rather than handling the matter quietly, he chose to address it head-on, determined to make a meaningful impact and create change in his restaurants and the hospitality industry as a whole.

Crabtree chose to share this story because he was shocked. Shocked that trusted leaders could be so disrespectful to others, that those who speak up receive little support, and that harassers often face no consequences. But the story is not about the offenders that caused so much pain and suffering. The story is about what to do next, he said.

Crabtree's experience is not unique. Sexual harassment remains pervasive, particularly in the hospitality industry. Because of this, Crabtree and his team chose to dedicate the LTR brand to preventing sexual harassment. Each dedicated chocolate box features a sticker highlighting that a portion of its sales supports a nonprofit dedicated to ending sexual harassment through education and awareness.

Crabtree Brands is a food and beverage company dedicated to strengthening the community through its products. The brand includes the restaurant and retail businesses Crabtree Kitchen and Bar, ChocMo Chocolatier and Cafe, and High Spirits in Poulsbo and LTR on Bainbridge Island.

But its roots trace back to when a teenage Peter Crabtree discovered his passion for



*Photos courtesy of Crabtree Brands*



*Crabtree Brands founder, Peter Crabtree, visits with people at his restaurant the Crabtree Kitchen and Bar in Poulsbo.*

## Feature

chocolate making in a high school culinary arts class.

"We made chocolates that afternoon as part of the course, and I was blown away by the ideas that I started having immediately on different cool things I could do to make chocolate interesting and fun," he said.

In 2005, Crabtree and his mother, Colleen, launched a small chocolate business to help fund his college education. As they built the business they knew that they would always choose what is right over what is profitable.

After college and a career in software, he realized that it wasn't the right fit and returned to the food industry to open ChocMo.

Over the years, the business grew, but COVID disrupted plans and created leadership gaps that proved difficult to fill.

In 2022, the Crabtree team was given the opportunity to purchase L'Atelier TR, a Bainbridge Island-based chocolate company. The original founders had sold the business earlier that year but remained on as employees. However, the new owner, recognizing that his expertise lay in coffee rather than chocolate, approached Crabtree with an offer to take over the company.

Crabtree knew the founders had a high level of skill in chocolate production and relevant experience. At the time, it seemed like the answer to the void in their leadership team.

So, Crabtree bought LTR, and its founders joined the leadership team at Crabtree Brands.

But a wake-up call came in January of 2024 when an employee suddenly quit on a Friday night. She did not give a reason but said "I don't want any part of what's going on. I'm leaving."

Crabtree did not know what that meant but knew he could not let that go. So Crabtree and his team started asking questions. It turned out there were a lot of things going on that had been kept quiet.

As they began to investigate, Crabtree was horrified by what they discovered. Multiple employees came forward to share that they had been sexually harassed by the people who supervised their work.

"It was stuff that shook me to my core," Crabtree said. "It was bad."

In response, Crabtree immediately fired the founders and banned them from company property. However, he realized that simply removing the offenders was not enough.

Following the incident, Crabtree and his team reflected on what was missing in their organization and the industry at large. They kept coming back to one word: trust.

"It was such an erosion of trust when that happened," he said. "And, the way that we can prevent more things from happening is to create a better sense of trust in our organization, so that when something, even something minor, happens, people feel confident that they can come forward and say, 'Hey, this just happened. I feel uncomfortable. Can we have a conversation around it,'" he said.



"Rather than the norm, which is, apparently people don't talk about it," he said. "We pretend it didn't happen. We, you know, we brush it under the rug."

People often don't speak up because they are worried about getting in trouble, he said.

After the incident, the Crabtree team workshopped a fresh start for the brand, redefining its purpose and identity.

L'Atelier, meaning "the workshop" in French, originally bore the initials of its founders. Now, TR stands for "TRust".

Today, L'Atelier TR represents "The Workshop for Trust," a brand dedicated to fostering open conversations about workplace behavior and the prevention of sexual assault and harassment in the industry.

Crabtree was determined to partner with an organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and violence. During discussions about how to respond, someone recommended Rebuilding Hope Sexual Assault Center.

"So I went to their website, and I read their annual reports and and their different newsletters and was really, really excited



about the focus that they had and the focus that they wanted to have around trainings and prevention and awareness, because that's where we wanted to focus our efforts," Crabtree said.

He reached out to Rebuilding Hope, an accredited sexual assault center serving Kitsap and Pierce counties, explaining that an incident had prompted his team to seek a partner for meaningful industry change.

The center's executive director, Carlyn Sampson, responded immediately, and after



*Peter Crabtree talks about his chocolate brand L'Atelier TR, which is dedicated to ending sexual harassment and assault in the hospitality industry. A portion of the sales is directed to Rebuilding Hope, an accredited sexual assault center serving Kitsap and Pierce counties.*

several conversations, it became clear they shared the same vision. Together, they forged a partnership to align LTR's mission with efforts to prevent sexual violence and foster a safer workplace culture.

During conversations with Sampson, the thing that kept coming up was Crabtree's wish to change the culture and stop sexual harassment in the hospitality industry.

"We want to talk about it," Crabtree told her. "We want to share this story. Because this is just not okay."

Sampson told him that it was shocking to hear because most companies come to Rebuilding Hope and say, 'make sure our company is protected,' he said.

"I said, No, screw that I'll burn the whole thing down before, I'll let this (the company) be more important than that," he said.

Crabtree told his employees the same thing when he learned they hadn't wanted to say anything because they were fearful that it might be harmful to the company.

"I said, I don't care about that," he said. "If there's stuff here that goes against our core values, that's way more important than the financial bottom line of the company. That's just the way that my family's always done business and the way that we exist in the world, and that's far more important than the bottom line."

Through the collaboration, LTR launched an initiative to support Rebuilding Hope's efforts. Each month, LTR selects a specific chocolate package, donating 15% of its sales to a fund dedicated to increasing awareness and education about sexual violence in the workplace.

The funds will be used for advertising Rebuilding Hope's new presence in Kitsap County and its available resources and sharing industry stories to destigmatize

survivors and spark prevention discussions.

They will also expand Rebuilding Hope's donor network in Kitsap County and support the goal of funding a full-time Prevention Advocate for the area.

Crabtree has established several goals for the partnership in the coming year.

One is to offer the dedicated chocolates to other area restaurants to put on their menu. The second goal involves working with Rebuilding Hope to develop a training program for the participating restaurants.

"So they'll have the opportunity then to talk about what this program is on their dessert menu, and how sexual harassment and sexual violence in the hospitality workplace in particular are something that needs to stop," he said. "That will give them the opportunity to say, 'hey, we're over here, standing against this also and doing that in a fun way through chocolate."

"That's what got me excited about chocolate to begin with, is the opportunity to use good taste and great flavors to create change and create some positivity," he said. "That's what our deliberate chocolate tagline is all about, and that's for all of our chocolate pieces."



The Crabtree team is working to integrate sexual harassment training into their everyday activities and are working to create a formal training.

"What we have done in particular is have lots of group and small group conversations around what kinds of behavior are okay and not okay," he said. "And supervisors in particular, because that was the crux of a lot of this issue, is people that are in a supervisory capacity then exerting their influence on subordinates to get them to do things that are not okay."

"One of the biggest things that we learned from this is how important it is to actually talk about an issue when it comes up," Peter said.

Since then, Crabtree Brands has made sexual harassment training a priority, holding frequent group discussions about appropriate workplace behavior. Supervisors now receive strict guidelines about professional behavior.

Before the incident, Crabtree's businesses did not have sexual harassment training. They assumed that hiring good people would prevent misconduct.

"And the reality is that we ignored a potential issue because we didn't think that it was relevant to us and our people here, because we were outside of what happens elsewhere," he said. "And that's apparently not the case."

"I really hope that we can change the culture around what's continued to be an issue in the hospitality industry," Crabtree said. ■

For more information visit [rebuildinghope.org](http://rebuildinghope.org) and [lateliertr.com](http://lateliertr.com).



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# Olympic College's \$10.5M Healthcare Moonshot:

Photos courtesy of Olympic College

## How a Small Campus Is Tackling America's Medical Staff Crisis

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Olympic College is nearing completion of the first phase of its two-phase plan to transform the Poulsbo campus into a regional hub for health sciences.

The phased plan will help the college expand its healthcare division to address the critical shortage of medical professionals in Kitsap and surrounding counties.

"Olympic College is addressing a national need for skilled workers on a local level with the expansion of healthcare programs at our Bremerton and Poulsbo campuses," said Olympic College President, Marty Cavalluzzi, Ph.D.

Grace Yaley, a graduate of Olympic College's Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program, experienced firsthand the benefits of the college's approach to healthcare education.

"My experience in the Health & Science program at Olympic

College was very positive," Yaley said. "I was enrolled in the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program, where small class sizes allowed for a more personalized learning experience. This close-knit environment allowed us to have great connections with professors and gave us some great support. The support was new to me, as I hadn't experienced it while earning my Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology Pre-Healthcare at a larger university."

Yaley also credited the program with helping her secure a job before graduation.

"Our preceptorship during the final quarter set many students up for employment, allowing them to have job offers lined up

after passing the NCLEX," she said.

She initially planned to complete her Bachelor of Nursing at a university but opted for Olympic College due to its affordability and flexibility.

"Olympic College was the best fit for me—not only because it was a lot less expensive, but also because I could work full-time while attending school," Yaley said.

With real-world training opportunities and strong connections to local healthcare employers, Olympic College continues to expand its impact.

OC partners with local healthcare providers, including St. Michael Medical Center, to provide hands-on training



Olympic College healthcare students learn how to accurately take a patient's blood pressure.



*OC healthcare students get hands-on training to prepare them for careers in the medical field.*



*Grace Yaley, a graduate of OC's Licensed Practical Nursing program, practices checking a patient's blood pressure.*

through clinicals and residencies for healthcare program students. The goal is for the student to train at the medical facility and then be able to secure employment there upon graduation.

"Olympic College continues to bring tremendous value to our community, helping to inspire and train future health care leaders," said Chad Melton, President of St. Michael Medical Center.

"It has been an honor collaborating with the team over the years and we look forward to seeing this next chapter come to life with the new Poulsbo Campus," Melton said. "The new campus represents opportunity

and hope for today's youth and students for generations to come."

Currently OC's healthcare division oversees 13 programs. However, the college's two-phase plan will add 10 more.

In February, Olympic College began construction at its Poulsbo campus. As part of Phase One, the existing campus building will be remodeled to house the Radiologic Technology, Diagnostic Medical Sonography, and Surgical Technology programs.

These three programs will welcome their first cohorts in the fall, each admitting 20 students.

The existing library at the Poulsbo campus will be

transformed into a state-of-the-art surgical training unit. The design will replicate a real surgical environment, featuring a pre-operative area, a surgery unit display board, and a sterile core with surgical sinks. The space will house four mock operating rooms where surgical technology students will train in real-world conditions.

The remodel will also include labs and classrooms for the radiology and sonography programs.

The first phase is fully funded at \$10.5 million, with contributions from Kitsap County Commissioners (\$6 million), Virginia Mason Franciscan Health (\$2.5 million), and Olympic College (\$2 million).

"We are grateful to our project partners the Kitsap County Commissioners and Virginia Mason Franciscan Health for their generous contributions to this project," Cavalluzzi said.

"We are already seeing the benefits of this project with the launch of two new programs in 2024 – Corpsman/Medic to LPN and Phlebotomy which combined have already enrolled more than 20 new students," he said. "And we are just getting started."

"At Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, we are deeply committed to expanding access to high-quality health care and strengthening the workforce that supports our communities," said Ketul J. Patel, Chief Executive Officer of Virginia Mason Franciscan Health and President of CommonSpirit Health's Northwest Region.

"This partnership with Olympic College and Kitsap County is a transformative step in ensuring that future generations of healthcare professionals are trained right here in our region," Patel said. "By investing in this state-of-the-art facility, we are not only addressing the current shortage

of skilled workers but also laying the foundation for innovative, patient-centered care for years to come."

Alecia Nye is the dean of nursing and allied health for Olympic College and has been deeply involved in the planning and implementation of the project.

OC is technically still in phase one of the plan but work has already begun on phase two. Nye has hired a developer for the dental hygiene program and the curriculum is mapped out. But phase two cannot fully proceed until the college has funding for the new building to house the programs, Nye said.

Phase two will include an 80,000-square-foot, five-story Health Sciences building on the Poulsbo campus. The new building will house a primary care clinic on the first floor. There will be classrooms, innovative learning spaces such as a multidisciplinary simulation and lab environments, and faculty, staff and administration office space.

Phase two programs include Dental Hygiene, Dental Assisting, Respiratory Therapy, and Paramedic and EMT training. Each program will admit 20 students.

The decision of what programs to add were based on community need. Nye surveyed community healthcare partners to determine what types of trained healthcare professionals were most needed to sustain the community and begin to address the crisis level shortage of healthcare workers.

Each program has accreditation requirements, which means it must meet the requirements set by a national accrediting board.

The dental hygiene program will be the heaviest lift to meet accrediting requirements, because it requires a dedicated physical space and oversight by a licensed dentist, Nye said.



However, the college will not have a dedicated space until the new building is completed on the Poulsbo campus.

"In the meantime, that's not stopping us," Nye said. "In reality, I know that building is not going to happen overnight. Nothing happens like that overnight. However, trying to find space is a possibility."

Due to the pressing demand for dental hygienists in the region, the college has already developed the curriculum for the Dental Hygiene program and is seeking interim space at local dental offices until the new building is constructed.

Nye hopes to work with a dentist that has extra space in their practice where the dental hygiene program can set up a lab and ultimately help work on patients until the new building is ready for students.



*OC's Dean of Nursing, Alecia Nye, works with a student learning IV placement and technique.*

Nye believes that there will be an outpouring of dentists who can and will want to offer space for the program.

Beyond Kitsap and Mason counties, Olympic College wants to help communities on the Olympic Peninsula. Nye has been in contact with Peninsula College in Port Angeles to figure out ways to help their students access medical programs the college does not have. It is a collaboration, not a competition, Nye said.

"My goal is to serve the whole peninsula, particularly those rural areas where students don't have many options," she said. "We're looking at hybrid models so students can train close to home and stay in their communities after graduation."

Despite funding challenges, Nye remains committed to expanding healthcare education in the region.

"People come here to change their lives," she said. "We serve our community, in our community, by graduating students in healthcare fields that are in dire straits."

"And so we're gearing this, not only to students who are interested in healthcare pathways, but in the end of this, we also are using this to help support our clinical partners, because they're going to be saturated with our students," she said.

For Nye the why of pushing forward to support and grow medical program for the region comes down to two things.

"I was an Olympic College Student 35 years ago who started at this college with three little kids and trying to figure out a way to support my family," she said. "And this college changed my life. The faculty here changed my life, the guidance I received here about my potential spearheaded me into a career that has been so important for me and my family."

"I think of the potential students coming in and changing their lives and their family's lives," she said.

"The second part of that is, well, we're in a health care crisis," she said. "If COVID gave us anything, it gave us the fact that something's going wrong, and we're not prepared for it," she said. "We already had a problem in healthcare, and it just escalated the obvious problems of burnout and shortages."

"How do we keep up with the demand in healthcare? Having a pipeline of graduates to support our community clinical sites is instrumental," she said. "That's the why. It's a win-win situation."

"I think about myself and how this college changed my life, and then a career in healthcare and supporting my community in that role, you know, was so meaningful and purposeful in many different ways," Nye said. "So I think that's why we're doing this, is to support that healthcare crisis in this county and surrounding counties."

"We need community members to know that we're here to serve this community long term with careers that are really sustainable and will change this community, the whole landscape in this community, I really think will be impacted positively by having these programs," Nye said. ■

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# Home Prices Rise in 89% of Metro Markets as Housing Wealth Gap Widens

## Washington State Shows Strong Regional Growth

Ward Media | Kitsap Business

The latest quarterly report from the National Association of REALTORS® reveals a continuing trend of home price increases across American metropolitan areas, with Washington state markets showing particularly robust growth amid national gains.

The report, released in February, shows that 201 out of 226 metro markets experienced home price increases during the fourth quarter of 2024, representing 89% of tracked areas. This growth occurred as 30-year fixed mortgage rates fluctuated between 6.12% and 6.85%.

The national median single-family existing-home price reached \$410,100, marking a 4.8% increase from the previous year. This growth accelerates from the third quarter's 3.2% year-over-year increase. Over a five-year span from 2019 to 2024, median home prices have surged by nearly 50%.

"Record-high home prices and the accompanying housing wealth gains are definitely good news for property owners," said NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun. "However, renters who are looking to transition into homeownership face significant hurdles."

In Washington state, the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue region led price appreciation with median single-family home prices reaching \$785,300, marking a 7.3% increase from the previous year. The area's prices peaked in the second quarter at \$829,600 before moderating in the latter half of the year. Bremerton-

Silverdale data was not separately reported in the latest figures, but the region typically follows similar trends to the broader Seattle metropolitan area. The Spokane-Spokane Valley area recorded one of the state's strongest performances, with prices rising 8.1% year-over-year to \$429,800, while the Kennewick-Richland area saw more modest gains of 2.6% to \$433,800.

The Western region, which includes Washington state, saw an overall 4.0% price increase, while the Northeast led regional gains with a 10.6% rise, followed by the Midwest at 8.0%. The South, which accounted for the largest share of single-family existing-home sales at 45.1%, registered a 2.1% price appreciation.

Housing affordability showed marginal improvement in the fourth quarter. The typical monthly mortgage payment for an existing single-family home with a 20% down payment decreased to \$2,124, down 0.8% from the third quarter and 1.7% from the previous year. Families typically allocated 24.8% of their income to mortgage payments, an improvement from 25.2% in the previous quarter.

First-time buyers saw slight relief in affordability metrics. For a typical starter home valued at \$348,600 with a 10% down payment, the monthly mortgage payment decreased to \$2,083, representing a 0.9% reduction from the previous quarter.

"While recognizing many workers may not have the option to relocate, those who can or are

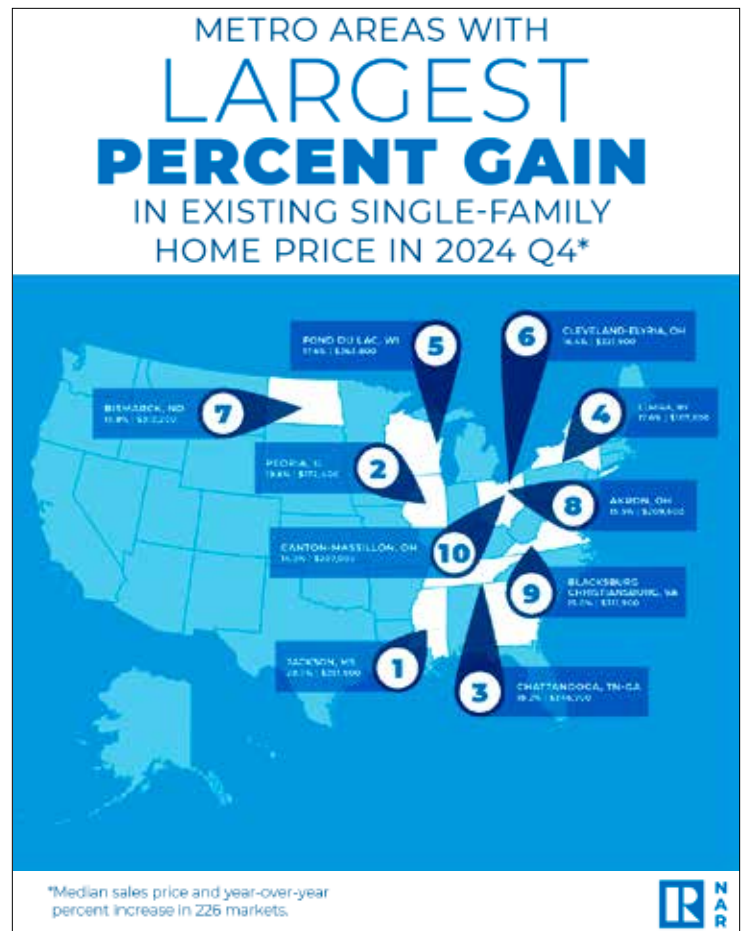
willing to move may find more affordable conditions, especially given the wide variance in home prices nationwide," Yun noted.

The report indicates that 43.8% of markets now require a qualifying income of at least \$100,000 for a 10% down payment mortgage, up from 42.5% in the previous quarter. Only 2.2% of markets remain accessible to buyers with qualifying incomes below \$50,000.

California dominated the list of most expensive markets, claiming eight of the top ten spots, with

the San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara area leading at \$1,920,000, representing a 9.7% increase from the previous year.

The data shows that while price declines occurred in some areas - 24 out of 226 markets - this represents an improvement from the third quarter when 13% of markets experienced decreases. All major Washington markets maintained positive price growth throughout the year, reflecting the region's strong economic fundamentals and sustained housing demand. ■



# BUSINESS Briefs

## U.S. Business Optimism Surges for 2025

Middle market business leaders are showing their strongest economic confidence since 2019, with recession fears dramatically declining, according to JPMorgan Chase's 2025 Business Leaders Outlook survey.

The survey of 1,641 executives found that 65% are optimistic about the national economy, while 75% express confidence in their own companies' performance. Only 14% anticipate a recession, down from 40% in early 2024.

Growth expectations are robust, with 74% of businesses projecting increased revenues and 53% planning to introduce new products or services. However, challenges persist - 46% cite workforce issues as their top concern, and 77% report rising costs.

"Leaders are optimistic and focused on growth for 2025," said Ginger Chambless, Head of Research at JPMorganChase Commercial Banking. "Recession concerns have dropped as businesses, consumers and markets have handled a period of elevated inflation and interest rates better than expected"

The survey was conducted between November 12 and December 4, 2024, among companies with annual revenues between \$20 million and \$500 million.

## New Business Applications Drop in January

Business applications fell 14% in January compared to December 2024, with 392,496

new applications filed, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released February 12.

The decline affected all major categories: high-propensity business applications decreased 11.3%, applications with planned wages dropped 11.1%, and corporate applications fell 8.6%. The Census Bureau noted the decrease was partially impacted by a scheduled IRS system outage between December 27, 2024 and January 2, 2025.

Projected business formations also declined, with the Census Bureau forecasting 24,574 new employer businesses will form within 4 quarters from January's applications - a 14.3% decrease from December's projections.

Retail trade led all sectors with 64,858 applications, followed by professional services with 52,907. The utilities sector saw the steepest decline at 28.4% compared to December.

The report shows decreases across all U.S. regions, with the Midwest experiencing the largest drop at 16.2%, while the West showed the smallest decline at 12.3%.

## Consumer Prices Rise 0.5% in January, Yearly Inflation at 3.0%

U.S. consumer prices increased 0.5% in January, following a 0.4% rise in December, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in February. The annual inflation rate reached 3.0%, up slightly from 2.9% in December.

Shelter costs, which rose 0.4%, accounted for nearly one-third of January's increase. Energy prices climbed 1.1%, with gasoline up 1.8%. Food prices increased 0.4%, as grocery prices rose 0.5% and restaurant prices gained 0.2%.

Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, increased 0.4% for the month and

3.3% year-over-year. Notable increases included motor vehicle insurance, recreation, used cars, and medical care.

The egg index surged 15.2% in January, the largest monthly increase since June 2015, driving much of the increase in grocery prices.

The next Consumer Price Index report will be released March 12.

## U.S. Labor Productivity Rises 1.2% in Q4 2024

Nonfarm business productivity increased 1.2% in the fourth quarter of 2024, with output rising 2.3% and hours worked up 1.0%, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in February.

Unit labor costs rose 3.0% in Q4, reflecting a 4.2% increase in hourly compensation and the 1.2% productivity gain. Real hourly compensation, adjusted for inflation, increased 1.1%.

Manufacturing sector productivity grew 0.8% in Q4, despite output declining 1.0%, as hours worked fell 1.8%. Durable manufacturing saw productivity drop 1.0%, while nondurable manufacturing productivity increased 2.2%.

For the full year 2024, nonfarm business productivity increased 2.3%, with output up 2.9% and hours worked rising 0.6%. Manufacturing productivity gained 0.3% for the year.

Revised data will be released March 6, incorporating annual benchmark revisions.

## Import and Export Prices Rise in January 2025

U.S. import prices increased 0.3% in January, the largest monthly gain since April 2024, while export prices jumped 1.3%, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in February.

Import fuel prices rose 3.2% for the month, driven by higher petroleum and natural gas costs. Nonfuel import prices edged up 0.1% for the third straight month. Overall import prices were up 1.9% from a year ago.

Export prices saw their biggest monthly increase since May 2022, as nonagricultural export prices rose 1.5% while agricultural export prices dipped 0.2%. The yearly gain in export prices reached 2.7%.

Trade with China showed increases, with import prices rising 0.3% and export prices up 0.8% in January. Import air passenger fares fell 12.8%, the largest drop since August 2023.

The next import and export price report will be released March 18. ■



# Legislative Day & Hill Climb

The Greater Kitsap Chamber & Visitor Center participated in the Association of Washington Business' annual Legislative Day & Hill Climb in early February, bringing a group of member businesses to meet with legislators and share issues facing local businesses in Kitsap. This is the second year the GKC has participated and we were pleased to be able to meet with local elected officials from both

the 23rd and the 26th Legislative Districts, including Representative Michelle Caldier, Representative Adison Richards, and staff from Representative Tarra Simmons office. The team was also able to attend a luncheon with special guest speaker Governor Bob Ferguson whose address was his first to the business community since he took office in late January, as well as new Department of Commerce Director, Joe Nguyen. ■





**Leadership Kitsap Foundation**

We're excited to recognize the Leadership Kitsap Foundation, members of the Chamber since 2016, as our January 2025 Members of the Month.

Leadership Kitsap, based in Bremerton, Washington, is a distinguished nonprofit organization dedicated to cultivating community leaders equipped to drive positive change within Kitsap County. Established in December 1993, the foundation has been steadfast in its mission to develop informed, prepared,

and engaged leaders who contribute significantly to the region's growth and cohesion. Over the past three decades, Leadership Kitsap has evolved into a cornerstone of leadership development in the area. The organization's flagship offering, the Signature Program, is a comprehensive 10-month course designed to provide participants with the necessary background, contacts, and tools to effectively lead and inspire within the community. Beyond the Signature Program, Leadership Kitsap offers a variety of initiatives

aimed at diverse segments of the community:

- **Premier Institute (LKPI):** This initiative serves as a hub for supervisory, management, and executive-level leadership training. It offers workshops, seminars, and peer coaching groups tailored to the unique needs of Kitsap County's public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- **20 Under 40 Awards:** An annual event that recognizes and celebrates

young professionals under the age of 40 who have demonstrated exceptional leadership and service within the community.

- **Kitsap Women's Summit:** In partnership with the Greater Kitsap Chamber, KWS is a platform dedicated to empowering women leaders by providing networking opportunities, workshops, and discussions focused on leadership development and community engagement. ■



**KITSAP CREDIT UNION**  
78<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
*Armed Forces Day*  
**FESTIVAL**  
**SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025**  
*Parade Starts at 10am in Downtown Bremerton!*

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**DEEP-DIVE BUSINESS SERIES** Partnering for Growth: Building Business-to-Business Relationships

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025, 2:00PM - 3:30PM  
GKC & VISITOR CENTER, BREMERNTON OFFICE

Brought to you by the Greater Kitsap Chamber's Business & Professional Development Committee





**Oxford Suites Silverdale**

Nestled along the beautiful shores of Dyes Inlet, Oxford Suites Silverdale offers more than just a place to stay—it provides a warm and inviting retreat for travelers. Whether you're visiting Silverdale for business, leisure, or a bit of both, this family-owned hotel stands out as a destination that combines comfort, convenience, and a personal touch.

**A Tradition of Excellence**

Oxford Suites Silverdale is part of the renowned Oxford Collection, a family-run hospitality group that has been welcoming guests for over 40 years. This Silverdale location reflects the brand's commitment to superior service and an exceptional guest experience.

From its picturesque waterfront location to its elegantly appointed rooms, every detail at Oxford Suites Silverdale is designed with guest satisfaction in mind. The team takes pride in creating an atmosphere where visitors feel not just accommodated but

genuinely cared for.

**Modern Amenities with a Personal Touch**

What sets Oxford Suites Silverdale apart is its thoughtful approach to hospitality. The hotel combines the comforts of home with the luxuries of a premier travel destination, offering an array of amenities and services to meet every need. With an emphasis on comfort, convenience, and excellent customer service, Oxford Suites Silverdale ensures a memorable stay for all guests.

**A Strong Connection to the Silverdale Community**

Beyond providing exceptional accommodations, Oxford Suites Silverdale plays an active role in the local community. They proudly partner with regional organizations, sponsor community events, and support local businesses, enhancing the vibrant Silverdale area.

The hotel's location makes it an ideal base for exploring the beauty and charm of Kitsap County. From hiking scenic trails to visiting local shops and restaurants, guests can



experience the best of Silverdale while staying just steps from the waterfront.

Whether you're traveling for business, planning a family getaway, or seeking a serene waterfront escape, Oxford Suites Silverdale offers the perfect blend of comfort and luxury. Discover why so many guests

choose to return year after year.

Visit [www.oxfordsuitesilverdale.com](http://www.oxfordsuitesilverdale.com) or follow them on Facebook to explore their accommodations, learn more about their services, or book your stay today. Experience the warmth and hospitality that make Oxford Suites Silverdale truly stand out! ■

# Member Renewed in December and January

## Community Connector



## Growth

Encore Communities (1992)

## Main Street

Gesa Credit Union (2019)  
 ImPark (2014)  
 Kitsap Transit (2014)  
 Martha & Mary (2003)  
 Roxy Theatre (2018)  
 Ryan, Montgomery & Armstrong (1999)  
 The Doctors Clinic (2005)

## Business

Ahoy Kitsap Playland (2017)  
 Dan Griffey, Washington House of Representative - 35<sup>th</sup> District (2015)  
 Domino's Pizza (1996)  
 Drew Hansen Washington State Senator - 23<sup>rd</sup> District (2007)  
 Drew MacEwen, Washington State Senator - 35<sup>th</sup> District (2013)  
 Evergreen Goodwill of Northwest Washington (2014)  
 Filter Girls (2017)  
 Greg Nance, Washington House of Representative - 23<sup>rd</sup> District (2024)  
 Hanley Construction (2012)

Illuminate.Me (2021)  
 Kitsap Chico Towing (2020)  
 Kitsap Transit (2014)  
 Leah Persinger, Realtor® (2024)  
 Michelle Caldier, Washington State Representative - 26<sup>th</sup> District (2015)  
 Milestone Marketing (2024)  
 Miss Poulsbo Miss Kitsap Organization (2020)  
 Olympic Presort (1997)  
 Photonatix Photo Booth Rental and Beyond (2023)  
 Sanchez, Mitchell, Eastman, & Cure (2020)  
 Seaport Salon Spa (2007)  
 SERVPRO of Kitsap County (2011)  
 Silverdale Water District (1992)  
 Silverdale Wellness Center (1998)  
 Skookum (1999)  
 Spiva Cooking (2021)  
 Spread Supplies (2023)  
 Suitcases on Standby Travel (2021)  
 Tarra Simmons, Washington House of Representative - 23<sup>rd</sup> District (2020)  
 Travis Couture, Washington

House of Representative - 35<sup>th</sup> District (2023)  
 Visit Kitsap Peninsula (1996)

Whitlock & Forster (1991)  
 Windermere Real Estate-Carter Dotson (2009) ■

**Thank you for your continuous support of the Chamber's Mission!**

# New Members that joined in December and January

## Community Connector



## Growth

Integrity Roofing & Construction (2024)  
 Randy's Heating (2025)

Bud Communications (2024)  
 Deborah Krishnadasan, Washington State Senator - 26<sup>th</sup> District (2025)  
 Force 10 Property Group (2025)  
 Honeybee Horticulture (2024)  
 New Motion Physical Therapy (2024)

## Main Street

Nordic Hill Manor (2024)

## Business

Adison Richards, Washington State Representative - 26<sup>th</sup> District (2025)  
 Albers Marcovina Vista Gardens Foundation (2024)

North Kitsap Fishline (2024)  
 Northwest Swag Group (2025)  
 Oran Root, Kitsap County Commissioner (2005)  
 Scoopology Poop Removal (2025)  
 T-Mobile, USA (2025) ■



# Big Comeback Year for the Housing Market

## More resale listings, more homes going under contract in Kitsap County

By Tom Earnest

Real Estate Broker / Realtor,  
John L. Scott Real Estate

### LEADING INDICATORS

Starting in 2024, the number of new resale listings started to increase compared to the same time last year. This is the leading indicator that more home buyers are entering the market, as many home buyers need to sell their current home before purchasing their next property.

As we progress through 2025, Kitsap County's housing market presents a nuanced landscape shaped by modest growth, fluctuating inventory, and evolving buyer-seller dynamics. Understanding these trends is crucial for stakeholders aiming to navigate the market effectively.

### CURRENT MARKET OVERVIEW

As of December 2024, the median home price in Kitsap County was approximately \$548,770, reflecting a 2.6% increase from the previous year. This steady appreciation underscores the county's enduring appeal to homebuyers.

In Bremerton for example, a significant urban center within the county, the housing market has demonstrated even more pronounced growth. The median home price reached \$470,006, marking a 6.5% rise over the past year. This surge indicates a robust demand, potentially driven by Bremerton's strategic location and amenities.

### INVENTORY AND MARKET DYNAMICS

The county continues to exhibit characteristics of a seller's market, where demand outpaces supply. In December 2024, there were 872 homes listed for sale, representing an 18% decrease from the previous month. This contraction in inventory could exert upward pressure on prices if buyer interest remains strong.

Homes in Kitsap County are selling relatively swiftly, with an average of 41 days on the market, a slight increase from 37 days the previous year. This indicates sustained buyer activity, although the marginal

increase in days on the market suggests a potential shift towards a more balanced environment.

### REGIONAL COMPARISONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

When compared to neighboring counties, Kitsap's housing market exhibits unique trends. For instance, Pierce County experienced a 4.8% increase in median home prices, while Mason County saw a 4.4% rise during the same period. Kitsap's growth, though modest, aligns with these regional patterns, suggesting a stable market trajectory.

Looking ahead, the broader Washington State housing market is anticipated to undergo moderate growth followed by relative stability through 2025. While specific forecasts for Kitsap County are limited, its recent performance suggests alignment with these statewide trends.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUYERS AND SELLERS

For prospective buyers, the current market conditions underscore the importance of timely decision-making and thorough preparation. With homes selling relatively quickly and inventory levels low, being pre-approved for financing and ready to act can be advantageous.

Sellers, on the other hand, continue to benefit from favorable market conditions. However, the slight increase in days on the market and the modest price appreciation suggest that realistic pricing and strategic marketing remain essential to attract qualified buyers.

### 6 KEY FACTORS FOR TODAY'S HOUSING MARKET:

- **Job Growth:** Close to job centers
- **Home Mortgage Interest Rates:** Forecasted to be in the 6% range in 2025
- **Tight Housing Supply:** Close to job centers
- **Energy Costs:** Anticipated to lower

- **Luxury Housing Market:** U.S. economy, job growth, and wealth effects drive the luxury market
- **Lifestyle/Destination Communities:** As the major metro areas heat up on the west coast, transactions spread throughout the Northwest.

### CONCLUSION

Kitsap County's housing market in 2025 is characterized by steady price growth, limited inventory, and a competitive landscape. Both buyers and sellers should stay informed about these trends to make well-informed decisions. Engaging with local real estate professionals and monitoring market developments will be key to navigating this evolving market successfully.

Remember: If any of your family or friends are thinking of moving and have any questions or need guidance, please let me know. ■





Photos courtesy of BC Fitness

*BC Fitness Studio is designed to empower people who might be intimidated by the traditional gym atmosphere.*

# From Fitness Struggle to Success Story:

## How This Entrepreneur Created a Safe Haven for the Gym-Shy

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

BC Fitness Studio in Silverdale offers an alternative to traditional gyms. For gym owner and founder, Brett Clark, his top priority is that his clients feel comfortable and safe.

The private strength training and coaching facility is designed to protect the privacy of clients. Sessions are by appointment only, the outside facing windows are tinted and the outside door stays locked during sessions to prevent onlookers.

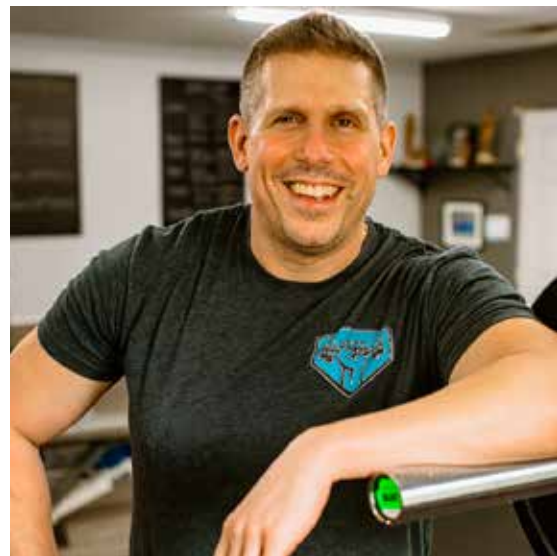
In BC Fitness, Clark has created a safe space for individuals who might find the regular gym scene too intimidating to stick with their fitness goals.

Clark and co-operator Lydia Estrada have worked hard to create and maintain a fitness facility that is an exclusive space with an inclusive atmosphere.

Clark and Estrada work with a diverse clientele, ranging from beginners embarking on their fitness journey to individuals returning to exercise, as well as pre- and post-operative orthopedic patients and amputees. Estrada specializes in post-stroke rehabilitation, helping clients rebuild neuromuscular pathways and improve neuroplasticity for greater mobility and independence.

"So we get to do some really, really cool stuff," he said.

Many of their clients do not want to go to a traditional gym because they do not want to feel judged.



*Brett Clark founded BC Fitness in 2021 with the idea of a different kind of gym.*

"So that's what really sets us apart from the gym is that we get to work with a unique group of people that traditionally don't want to join the gym atmosphere," he said.

"It really kind of centers around our clients and really the amazing people that they are, and they come here and they feel a certain way," he said. "You know, they feel like they let themselves go. They feel maybe they're a broken version of themselves."

"But I think one of the things that makes it really unique is that when they sit down with Lydia and I, they realize that we're real people too, and we're on real journeys, and that we both struggle," he said. "She and I both struggle with obesity. We both struggle with an eating disorder each."

"And so they really find that place where they realize that they're in an environment where people understand them," he said. "I think that's really the most important part, is that the bond that we have with our clients is absolutely tremendous. And so we have phenomenal client retention."

Clark and Estrada work to help their clients gain the attitude and skills to be successful in a traditional gym atmosphere and to create sustainable fitness habits for their clients.

"Everything that we do is all about sustainability, and how can clients sustain that? Because we believe that muscle is the longevity organ," he said. "We believe that what propels people to be healthy for their lifetime is strength and resistance training, and so that's what we do here."

From the emotional side of what they do, Clark and Estrada love to see people gain confidence through their workouts.

Clark especially enjoys the moment he sees clients realize that they can do hard things and are so much more powerful than they previously gave themselves credit for.

"That's what excites Lydia and I, because we can see that turn on in you, where you fall in love with what it is that you're doing," he said. "Strength Training has this tangibility that you can't get from some of these other modalities, like cardio. Strength training is just your ability to do something complex and be successful at it."

From the personal trainer side Clark and Estrada love that they can help people with their lifestyle related illnesses like diabetes and high blood pressure.

"We can help people get better without medications," he said.



***BC Fitness owner Brett Clark and co-operator Lydia Estrada have created a private fitness studio designed to make gym workouts less intimidating.***

The concept for a different approach to fitness began with Clark's own fitness struggles 18 years ago.

"I was 30 years old and I was obese, and I didn't really know what I was going to do, right? And when you say, I want to get fit, that's the easiest decision you're going to make, because everything after that is hard, where are you going to do it? How are you going to do it? You know, am I going to do things correctly," he said.

After multiple failed attempts to get fit in a gym, Clark decided to become a personal trainer. Not because he thought he would train others, but because knowledge is power and he could then train himself, he reasoned.

"Anyway, I fell in love with fitness," he said. "I fell in love with getting fit. My fitness journey wasn't linear, it looked like an EKG, just like all of us, right? But the whole time, I thought, gyms don't have it right," he said. "They're not building environments where people want to work out, especially people like me, who are obese."

At the time, Clark thought that if he ever had the opportunity to create a gym, it wouldn't be a gym, it would be a private

fitness facility where people could focus on the things that are important to them and have one-on-one time with their trainer. To him that is the most important part, creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable.

When he was studying to be a personal trainer, one of the things he wanted to understand was why people go to the gym for three weeks and then you never see them again.

"That's what I really, really wanted to understand, and that's how I developed the ethos that gyms have it wrong," he said.

In 2020 gyms were shut down because of the pandemic and Clark saw an opening.

"I thought, I have an opportunity, I can actually open up a private fitness facility and adhere to the COVID standards by keeping people on a one-on-one basis, having the distance that they need to have, and in essence, be able to operate a fitness facility," he said.

So in March 2021, Clark started BC Fitness Studio essentially as a way to test his theory and learn.

"And what I learned was that I was correct," he said. "There's a subset of

## Health



*Tech Fit Studios is a part of BC Fitness that offers data-driven results.*

people that want that private atmosphere.”

Clark had worked in retail management for years but felt like it was time to make a change.

“I was sort of at that halfway point in my life, at 45 years old, and I thought, entrepreneurship has always been this, I wouldn’t say passion, but it was always this curiosity that I had, what would it be like to be an entrepreneur? And I kind of felt like if I didn’t go then I probably wouldn’t go at all,” he said.

“And so that was kind of my leaping off point when I said, you know, I’m 45, I’ve had 25 years in retail management, if I’m going to do something, then you do it now,” he said.

Clark also founded Tech Fit Studios, a data-driven fitness program. There are two Tech Fit Studios at BC Fitness that offer a digital wall-mounted console that combines strength training with digital tracking.

Initially it was aimed at busy

professionals and younger individuals. However, the concept proved effective for a wider audience.

One of its standout success stories is a 65 year-old client who had been on and off fitness journeys his entire life, typically lasting about three weeks on any program. However, after joining Tech Fit Studios, he found motivation through its data-driven approach.

The client is not outwardly competitive but inwardly competitive and has thrived on tracking his progress digitally. Now the client has a 67 week streak of working out.

“So the guy that gives up on himself every three weeks, twice a week, he comes in here for 67 straight weeks, and he exercises,” Clark said. “So he loves that aspect of data.”

Over 67 consecutive weeks, he has completed 147 workouts, lifted 1.7 million pounds, and increased his upper body strength by 494%.



*BC Fitness Studio in Silverdale offers an alternative to traditional gyms.*

“People love the gamification aspect of it,” Clark said. “They love to see their results.”

Another branch of BC Fitness is Kitsap Golf and Performance, which uses analytical data to improve golf swing mechanics and build strength and endurance to play the sport longer.

“So what we do is we work with, again, analytical data to help people improve their golf swings, not in the way of, like putting and chipping, but really getting good swing mechanics to hit the ball farther, but also to play longer, because you’re working people’s bodies better,” he said.

Plans for the future include adding POP Pilates, a meal service in partnership with Spiva Cooking and a possible second location in North Kitsap.

“We’re really excited about expanding,” he said. “We have a large pull from the north side of

our community, and we would be really well served if we were able to expand up into the north end of the community of Poulsbo or Bainbridge Island.”

One of Clark’s goals for BC Fitness is to provide resources for all things health and wellness. At least once a month the business hosts free Wednesday Wellness events with an expert presenter for the topic that day. Some of the popular sessions have been about menopause, healthy cooking, and acupuncture.

“So for us, it’s not only about building our community through health and wellness, but also building community members as well and drawing attention to the great work they’re doing,” he said. “And hopefully people appreciate that and then patronize their businesses as well.” ■

*For more information, visit [bcfitstudio.com](http://bcfitstudio.com).*

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# Q & A

Executive



Photos courtesy of Brittany Kelley

## Alanna Imbach

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

Meet Alanna Imbach, Vibe Coworks founder and Executive Director of Matchstick Lab.

Imbach is a community builder, entrepreneur and advocate for innovation in Kitsap County. Her background in international development, including work with the UN Refugee Agency and WaterAid, gives her a global perspective on collaboration, resilience, and impact.

Imbach co-founded Vibe Coworks with her husband, Marcel, in 2016 and in 2023 started Matchstick Lab. In January, Imbach stepped into the role of Executive Director of Matchstick Lab where she fosters business growth, investment, and peer-to-peer learning to strengthen the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Imbach is passionate about breaking down barriers, and believes in the power of relationships, bold ambition, and making every opportunity count.

### Please Tell Our Readers A Little Bit About Yourself.

I'm a weaver of people—a builder of authentic, purpose-driven communities, and

a champion for people with big ideas.

My career has taken me around the world, from the frontlines of international development—working with organizations like the UN Refugee Agency and WaterAid—to the heart of Kitsap's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Today, I'm the founder of Vibe Coworks, Kitsap's premier shared workspace, and the Executive Director of Matchstick Lab, a new initiative dedicated to accelerating business growth and investment in our region. My passion lies in creating spaces—both physical and figurative—where people can come together to collaborate, innovate, and thrive.

### Please Tell Our Readers About Vibe Coworks And Matchstick Lab.

Vibe Coworks is Kitsap's premier shared workspace and coworking community—a dynamic hub for entrepreneurs, remote workers, and creatives to do their best work alongside like-minded peers.

We believe that proximity to great people and great ideas accelerates success, which is why we provide stunningly beautiful work, meeting and event spaces designed to help people work happier, healthier, and more connected than ever before. Think of Vibe as “the place where the magic happens.”

Matchstick Lab has evolved out of Vibe as an extension of that mission, with focused commitment to making Kitsap the go-to place to launch and grow businesses that benefit the region, and bring value to the world.

Fiscally sponsored by the Kitsap Community Foundation, Matchstick Lab is unlocking the peer-to-peer accelerated learning, access to capital, and storytelling resources that are needed to fuel true economic growth and innovation in Kitsap.

Together with our partners, and through programs including the Micro Business Accelerator, the Firebrand Unconference, and our work with NavalX NW Tech Bridge, we connect Kitsap's founders, small businesses, investors, and ecosystem partners with the education, investment, and storytelling resources needed to fuel economic growth and innovation across the region.

### How Did Your Experiences Working With Organizations Like The UN Refugee Agency And WaterAid Shape Your Approach To Building Vibe Coworks?

My background in international development taught me the power of collaboration, resourcefulness, and resilience—all of which are core to what we do at both Vibe Coworks and Matchstick Lab.

When you work on global challenges like refugee displacement and access to clean water, you quickly realize that no one succeeds alone—it takes thoughtful, strategic partnerships, shared knowledge, and a commitment to solving problems together to get things done.

That perspective has deeply influenced the way I've built Vibe Coworks. It's not just about providing a workspace—it's about creating a community where people can access the support, resources, and relationships they need to grow.

Working at the global level on some of the world's complex challenges also taught me that, if you want to solve big problems, you can't be afraid to think big and imagine solutions far beyond conventional limits. I was pushed to do that early in my career,



and that mindset carries over to everything I do today.

### **You've Had An Incredible Career In International Development And Social Impact. What Led You To Transition Into Entrepreneurship And Coworking With Vibe Coworks?**

I've always been driven by impact. For years, that meant working at the global level—helping organizations address critical issues like refugee resettlement, access to clean water and toilets, and women's health.

My foray into entrepreneurship was accidental. When my husband Marcel and I decided to move back to Kitsap to be closer to family, we were fortunate to bring our remote jobs with us—but we quickly realized that having both of us working from home was not going to end well. We had both experienced the benefits of coworking spaces in NYC and thought: why not create something on par with what we were used to there, so we'd have a great place to work that still fit in with what makes Kitsap so special?

What started as a practical solution for ourselves quickly became a much greater opportunity to create real impact in Kitsap. We saw how we could provide an alternative to exhausting ferry commutes and isolating home offices. More than that, we realized we could help drive a certain density of people and ideas, helping remote workers, business owners, creatives, and entrepreneurs succeed in a place brimming with untapped potential.

In the end, launching a coworking community and fostering a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem isn't so different from my work in international development: it's all about breaking down barriers, providing access to the right tools, and elevating community-driven solutions.

### **What Was Your Vision For Vibe Coworks When You First Started, And How Has It Evolved?**

The vision for Vibe Coworks has always been to create a world-class workspace and a thriving community for independent professionals, entrepreneurs, and remote teams—right here in Kitsap.

When we first started, our goal was to solve the isolation problem that so many business owners and remote workers experience outside of major cities. What's

evolved is our recognition that we're also a catalyst for community and economic development.

With Matchstick Lab working in tandem with Vibe Coworks, we're not just giving people a place to work—we're serving as weavers of people, igniting the full potential of startup and business development in Kitsap, while celebrating our distinct heritage, resources and talents.

### **What Role Do You See Coworking Spaces Playing In The Future Of Work, Especially In Smaller Cities Like Those In The West Sound Region?**

Coworking is the future of work—especially in non-urban regions like Kitsap, where four-hour roundtrip commutes to Seattle and a lack of professional density come at a tremendous opportunity cost. While some companies—and the federal government—are now testing Return to Office (RTO) mandates, the reality is that the demand for flexibility, autonomy, and authentic human connection in the work we do has only continued to grow.

For many—especially working parents, caregivers, and people with disabilities—rigid office policies create barriers to employment, career advancement, and overall well-being. Flexible work environments like Vibe Coworks are critical to fostering equity, inclusion, and economic opportunity. People who have the freedom to choose when and how they work are happier, healthier, and more productive.

In regions like Kitsap, coworking spaces serve as economic engines—providing cost-effective, high-quality workspace solutions for remote workers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses. They also help retain local talent by offering a viable alternative to long commutes or relocation.

Vibe Coworks' most recent impact study highlights the power of professional relationships formed through coworking. In today's economy, social networks are essential for business growth and career success:

- 50% of members have made professional referrals to another Vibe member
- 13% have hired a fellow member
- 36% have partnered with another member on paid work or volunteer collaborations

Coworking also makes work more enjoyable and effective:

- 73% of Vibe members report having made new professional connections
- 69% are happier since joining
- 70% are more productive
- 69% are more focused
- 54% feel less stressed

### **What Advice Would You Give To Entrepreneurs—Especially Women—Who Want To Build Businesses With A Strong Community Focus?**

1. **Start with relationships.** Business isn't just about what you build—it's about who you build it with. Invest in your network, seek out mentors, and surround



*On the first Friday of the month, Vibe Coworks offers free coworking. At 4 p.m. coworkers can go next door to Crabtree Kitchen and Bar for a no-host happy hour.*

## Executive Q & A

yourself with people who challenge and support you. The strength of your community will define the strength of your business.

**2. Own your ambition.** Women, in particular, are often conditioned to think small, ask for less, or downplay their ambitions. Don't. Dream bigger, ask for more funding, and charge what you're worth. Your vision deserves to take up space.

**3. Get crystal clear on your 'why.'** If you're building a community-driven business, be specific about who you serve, how you serve them, and why it matters. Passion is important, but clarity is what drives results.

**4. Understand that community is built through action, not intention.**

You can't just say you're community-focused—you have to show up, listen, and create value over and over again. Be the first to offer help, make introductions, and celebrate others' success. The more you give, the stronger your community will become.

**5. Sustainability matters.** A business that burns you out isn't a business that serves anyone. Too often, community-focused founders—especially women—pour so much into others that they forget to create sustainable revenue models for themselves. Prioritize financial health alongside impact.

**6. Ask for help. Often.** No one builds a business alone. Seek out investors, advisors, collaborators, and champions. And remember: you don't need permission to lead. You just need a strong idea, the courage to start, and the resilience to keep going.

### Are There Any Social Impact Projects Or Partnerships You're Particularly Excited About Right Now?

Right now, I'm most excited about the growth and evolution of Matchstick Lab. What started as an extension of Vibe Coworks has quickly become something bigger—a catalyst for regional ecosystem development built around accelerated learning, access to capital, and storytelling.

We're currently building out our advisory board, which will play a critical role in shaping the future of the organization and



*Imbach and her Vibe Coworks team believe in creating connections and growing a strong, creative professional community at Vibe.*

how we support entrepreneurs, startups, business owners, and investors across Kitsap. The opportunity ahead isn't just about supporting individual founders—it's about strengthening the entire business ecosystem so that more people can successfully launch, fund, and scale ventures right here in our region.

Through programs like the Micro Business Accelerator, the Firebrand Unconference, and our work with NavalX NW Tech Bridge, we're already proving what's possible when founders, investors, and ecosystem partners come together with the right support. But this is just the beginning.

Looking ahead, Matchstick Lab has the potential to redefine what entrepreneurial success looks like in Kitsap—not as an exception, but as the norm. We're building something that ensures business owners don't have to leave the region to thrive—they can build, scale, and create real impact right here at home.

### What's One Piece Of Career Advice That Has Stuck With You Throughout Your Journey?

"Make it count."

It's a lesson I learned in my early twenties when I was working as a Policy Associate at the United Nations in Geneva: you have exactly 90 seconds to make an intervention on the floor. Choose your words wisely, and make those 90 seconds count. That lesson applies to everything in life.

Time, energy, opportunities—they're all finite. If you're going to do something, do it with intention, do it well, and make it matter. That means showing up fully, taking risks, and choosing to invest in the things that truly move the needle—whether in business, relationships, or life. Your impact is a direct reflection of where you choose to invest yourself.

At the same time, success doesn't happen in a vacuum. No one builds anything great alone. The people you surround yourself with matter. The support you seek, the relationships you nurture, and the way you show up for others—it all shapes the path forward.

If there's an opportunity in front of you, take it. If the opportunity doesn't exist yet, create it. You may only get one shot, and you don't need permission to lead. Make it count.

### Who Or What Inspires You?

I'm inspired by bold, visionary people who refuse to accept the status quo—whether they're global changemakers or local business owners.

I'm also deeply inspired by the entrepreneurs and founders right here in Kitsap. These are the people who are out there taking risks, creating jobs, and solving problems—often without the same access to capital and resources as their counterparts in major cities. It takes a lot of guts and grit to drive a business in non-urban regions like ours. Their determination, creativity, and passion keep me motivated every day. ■

# U.S. Job Market Shows Steady Growth in January, Unemployment Edges Down

The U.S. labor market maintained its momentum in January, with employers adding 143,000 jobs while the unemployment rate decreased slightly to 4.0 percent, according to data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Ward Media | **Kitsap Business**

The U.S. labor market maintained its momentum in January, with employers adding 143,000 jobs while the unemployment rate decreased slightly to 4.0 percent, according to data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The January job gains, while modest compared to December's revised figure of 307,000, signal continued stability in the labor market. Notable growth occurred in several key sectors, with health care leading the way by adding 44,000 jobs. Hospitals gained 14,000 positions, while nursing and residential care facilities added 13,000 jobs, and home health care services increased by 11,000.

Retail trade showed significant expansion with 34,000 new jobs, primarily driven by general merchandise retailers (+31,000) and furniture and home furnishings stores (+5,000).

However, electronics and appliance retailers experienced a decline of 7,000 jobs.

The social assistance sector grew by 22,000 positions, with individual and family services accounting for 20,000 of those gains. Government employment continued its upward trend, adding 32,000 jobs in January, maintaining pace with its 2024 monthly average of 38,000. However, this data predates the recently announced federal workforce changes that began in mid-February.

One sector experiencing decline was mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, which lost 8,000 jobs over the month, with losses concentrated in support activities for mining. Other major industries, including construction, manufacturing, wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing, information, financial activities, professional and business services, and leisure and hospitality, showed little change.

Average hourly earnings for

all private-sector employees rose by 17 cents to \$35.87, representing a 4.1 percent increase over the past 12 months. The average workweek for all employees on private nonfarm payrolls decreased slightly by 0.1 hour to 34.1 hours.

The report also revealed that previous employment estimates for November and December 2024 were revised upward by a combined 100,000 jobs. November's gains were adjusted from +212,000 to +261,000, while December's figures were revised from +256,000 to +307,000.

The labor force participation rate remained steady at 62.6 percent, while the employment-population ratio held at 60.1 percent. Both measures have shown relatively little movement in recent months.

The number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks or more) was essentially unchanged at 1.4 million in January, representing 21.1 percent of all unemployed persons.

The data release noted that January's figures reflect updated population controls and the annual benchmarking process, which helps ensure accurate measurement of employment trends.

The February employment report, scheduled for release on March 7, will be closely watched by economists and market analysts, particularly for its first assessment of how recent federal workforce reductions may impact government employment numbers. The changes, which began in mid-February, have affected multiple federal agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Energy, and various health agencies.

These February developments occurred after the January survey period and are not reflected in the current report. The BLS employment situation report surveys reference the pay period that includes the 12th of each month. ■

# Changing Faces Changing Places

The following announcements highlight staff changes, changes of ownership or location, honors, awards, new board member listings, promotions, donations, and certifications. To submit information, email [news@kitsapbusiness.com](mailto:news@kitsapbusiness.com).

## Promotions

**Kitsap Bank** has promoted **Ginette Dalton** to Senior Vice President, Retail Banking, marking another milestone in her remarkable 22-year journey with the Port Orchard-based financial institution. Since joining as Branch Manager at the Gig Harbor location in 2003, Dalton has steadily risen through the ranks, earning recognition for her strategic leadership and commitment to client relationships. In her expanded role, Dalton will continue to shape the bank's retail operations while co-leading its Leadership Challenge program, which



*Ginette Dalton*

has developed nearly 100 banking professionals. Charles Robertson, EVP and Chief Retail Officer, praised Dalton's appointment, noting her consistent ability to "go above and beyond" for both customers and team members.

**Vibe Coworks** has promoted **Amber Sallay** to Director of Operations. Sallay, who joined the organization in March 2022 as a Part-Time Community Lead, quickly distinguished herself through her leadership in fostering the collaborative environment that has become Vibe's hallmark. In her new role, Sallay will oversee



*Amber Sallay*

all operational aspects of the Poulsbo-based workspace, which serves a diverse community of remote workers, entrepreneurs, and government employees. "Amber has shown exceptional leadership and commitment to our mission," notes Vibe Coworks Founder and CEO, Alanna Imbach. "Her promotion reflects her impact on the Vibe community and her readiness to guide us as we grow." The appointment supports Vibe's mission to strengthen its presence in non-urban regions, focusing on unlocking local talent and innovation across the Kitsap Peninsula. Sallay emphasizes her commitment to this vision: "Vibe Coworks isn't just a workspace—it's truly a place for connection, innovation, and collaboration."

**Kitsap Bank** has promoted **Rachel Dunger** to Assistant Vice President, Branch Manager II at its South Park Village Branch in Port Orchard. Dunger joined the bank in 2022 as a Financial Service Specialist for the Southern Region. During her tenure, Dunger has focused on customer service excellence while maintaining active community involvement. She currently volunteers with South Kitsap Helpline, Central Kitsap Food Bank, Girls on the Run, Holly Ridge Center, and the Salvation Army. Jennifer Ruckman, SVP, Regional Operations Manager, cited Dunger's leadership and commitment



*Rachel Dunger*

  
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to building strong customer relationships as key factors in her promotion. Dunger will oversee operations at the South Park Village location while continuing her community service work.

**Vibe Coworks** has appointed **Kelsi Nymon** as its inaugural Community Coordinator. A Bremerton local with a background in tech recruitment and HR, Nymon brings expertise in community building and creative engagement to the role. Her experience spans diverse sectors, including NewSpace and Clean Tech, where she worked as a headhunter and content strategist for creative businesses. Beyond her part-time position at Vibe, Nymon is an active force in the local arts scene, managing Bremerton's Free Little Art Gallery and participating in Bainbridge Artisan Resource Network (BARN). Her appointment underscores Vibe's commitment to fostering professional connections and creative collaboration across the region.

**Kitsap Bank** has elevated **Samantha Thornton** to Assistant Vice President, Credit Officer, building on her impressive trajectory since joining the institution in 2015. Thornton, who began as a Credit Analyst, has established herself as a key figure in the bank's credit risk management operations. Drawing from her business administration background from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Thornton has consistently demonstrated sharp analytical acumen in her advancing roles. Elizabeth Robertson, SVP and Credit Administrator, highlighted Thornton's exceptional leadership qualities and willingness to tackle new challenges, noting her "positive attitude and grace" in supporting colleagues.



Samantha Thornton

The promotion reflects Thornton's growing influence within Kitsap Bank's commercial lending division, where her expertise has become instrumental in maintaining the institution's robust credit evaluation processes. Her advancement underscores the Port Orchard-based bank's commitment to nurturing internal talent and strengthening its credit management capabilities.

### On Top

**Rob Hartman** of **RE/MAX Platinum Services** has obtained his Managing Broker's License. The credential expands Hartman's role at the Silverdale real estate office, adding to the firm's leadership capabilities.



Rob Hartman

**Irene Garcia** of **RE/MAX Platinum Services** received recognition from the Women's Council of Realtors during WAR Hill Day for her work as a liaison. The acknowledgment highlights Garcia's leadership contributions to the real estate community.



**RE/MAX Platinum Services** has earned the Certified Full-Service Professional Designation across its entire office, marking them among the first real estate offices in Washington State to reach this milestone



**Frank Leach** of **RE/MAX Platinum Services** has received an award from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service (NWMLS) for his leadership contributions in 2024. The honor acknowledges Leach's service to the real estate community.



Frank Leach

### Business is Booming

**Matchstick Lab** has signed a new contract with the NW Tech Bridge and Parallax Research for a 2-year program of work focused on fostering innovation within the defense sector and building a sustainable pipeline of entrepreneurial talent to address Navy challenges and opportunities.

**Made Rich Financial** has launched its flagship Training Center in Silverdale, creating a new destination for financial education and wealth-building strategies in the region.

The facility serves both established business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on youth mentorship programs. The center's comprehensive curriculum spans personal finance management, strategic business planning, and wealth accumulation techniques, positioning itself as Silverdale's central resource for financial literacy and business development. The new facility adds to Silverdale's business landscape, with Made Rich Financial offering specialized programs for various community segments, from families seeking better money management skills to entrepreneurs looking to scale their operations.

In partnership with the **Kitsap Economic Development Alliance**, **Matchstick Lab** celebrates the February launch of the third edition of the Micro Business Accelerator, funded by the Washington State Microenterprise Alliance, and the Washington State Department of Commerce. ■

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# Crafting your brand:

The importance of a consistent presence

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

**A**chieving long-term business success requires more than just offering great products or services—it requires a strategic approach. A well-structured marketing plan can serve as your roadmap for sustainable growth. Defining your business identity will shape your marketing plan and keep you on the right path. What makes your business unique, and how does it stand out among competitors? This foundational knowledge not only brings clarity to your business but also forms the bedrock for effective communication with your target audience.

Once you've established your identity, the spotlight turns to creating awareness around your brand and business. Awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in fostering recognition and connecting with your audience on a deeper level. However, it's not just about being known; it's about securing a prime spot in the minds of your customers. This is where the concept of "Top of Mind Awareness" (TOMA) comes into play.

Top of Mind Awareness refers to the ability of a brand to be the first one that comes to mind when a customer thinks about a particular product or service. Achieving TOMA means consistently occupying a prominent space in the minds of your audience. It's not merely about having a presence; it's about being the go-to option when a need arises.

Consistency is the key to building and maintaining Top of Mind Awareness. Regularly engaging with your audience through various channels, be it social media, email campaigns, digital or print advertising, reinforces your brand presence. The more frequently your audience encounters your



brand, the more likely they will remember and choose you when making purchasing decisions.

Imagine your brand as a familiar face in a crowded room — the more often that face appears, the more likely it is to be recognized and remembered. Consistent visibility builds trust, familiarity, and a sense of reliability among your audience.

Building strong brand recognition requires more than just visibility—it demands a strategic approach to Top of Mind Awareness. A dedicated team with experience in crafting and executing effective awareness campaigns can help ensure your brand not only stands out but

stays at the forefront of your audience's mind. By creating messaging that resonates and engages, the right team will elevate your brand's presence and long-term impact.

As you embark on your marketing journey this year, remember that brand awareness goes beyond being recognized; it's about being remembered. Cultivate Top of Mind Awareness through consistent, strategic engagement, and find a team who will guide you in creating a customized plan that aligns with the unique identity of your business. ■

*Amy Yaley is the COO of Ward Media and the co-owner of Northwest Swag Works. She can be reached at amy@ward.media.*

# 2025 Events:

34<sup>th</sup> Annual Seagull Calling Contest - Memorial Day Weekend

Kitsap Cornhole Classic - August

Rocky Horror Picture Show Anniversary - September 25<sup>th</sup>



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