

CHAMBER CHAT

FEBRUARY 2022

Awards highlight the best of 2021



By Andy Mayer/President & CEO

2021 was a very good year for the Chamber, despite the pandemic that continued to affect us. Along the way, it has been you, our members, who have been so valuable to all we do. So without further ado, here is a rundown of the 2021 Chamber Awards winners:

Ambassador of the Year: Phil Thornley, Primerica

In times where the personal connection has been somehow dampened, our award winner Phil Thornley has found a way to not only be a welcoming face for our new members but a powerful connector in our community. Phil cares about helping others both through his role at Primerica and as a chamber ambassador. He is constantly supporting those around him to reach their full potential.

Rising Star: Julia Phillip, Sisters Espresso

In addition to successfully running her real estate

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Marketing Mastermind: Planning & Scripting for Video

Thursday, Feb. 3

10 a.m.

via Zoom

[Register here](#)

Ready to jump into video? Give yourself a strong foundation by deliberately planning and scripting your video before it's time to record. The Mount Vernon Chamber's marketing specialist Hilary Parker outlines how to get started. Bring your video ideas to share with the group, and make this the year your business takes off with video!

Knowledge NOW

Shapes: Building Strong Work Teams from the Inside Out

Wednesday, Feb. 9

Noon

via Zoom

[Register here](#)

Certified Peer Counselor Randi Breuer presents *Shapes: A look inside our teams and how they work*. This in-depth workshop covers defining our strengths and areas of growth, giving us insight into how to be a strengths-based workplace, group or team.

Help welcome new members

Be one of the first to introduce your business to new chamber members by providing your company swag or special offer, to be included in every welcome bag. Contact Silvia Reed to donate: (360) 395-2944

Latino Business Leaders

Lo Que Necesita Saber Sobre el Departamento de Labor & Industrias – What you need to know about L&I

Tuesday, Feb. 15

6-7:30 p.m.

via Zoom

[Register here](#)

Presented in Spanish

Carmen Rivera and Andrea Munoz from L&I present. During this session you will learn:

- How to obtain licenses and permits;
- Requirements for manufactured, modular and mobile structures (including food trucks and trailers);
- Workers' rights.

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Chamber Membership Luncheon

Wednesday, Feb. 23

11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

via Zoom

[Register here](#)

Regional economist Anneliese Vance-Sherman from the Washington State Employment Security Department will review state and local labor market trends from throughout the pandemic. She will touch upon some of the industry-specific trends and challenges, as viewed through a labor market lens, as well as some of the challenges facing the workforce itself.

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Congratulations to all the 2021 award winners



Julie Blazek, HPK Architects, Business Person of the Year



Tina Tate, Friendship House, Making a Difference Award



Phil Thornley, Primerica, Ambassador of the Year



Julia Phillip, Rising Star, Sisters Espresso

...continued from page 1

business, in October 2000 Julia became the new owner of Sisters Espresso in Bow and in 2021 became the new owner of Whistle Stoppe Coffee Shoppe in downtown Mount Vernon. Julia empowers her team to believe in themselves, to gain and cultivate new skills that will allow them to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Making a Difference Award: Tina Tate, Friendship House

Tina's vision and hard work to expand the programs and facilities at Friendship House as its executive director have been remarkable. They now include two clean and sober emergency shelters, one transitional house, one permanent low-income shared living house, a daily meal service, and an innovative employment training program. To add to that impressive list of services, Tina has now

accomplished a long-held dream of hers by planning, starting and running the Skagit First Step Center.

Business Person of the Year: Julie Blazek, HKP Architects

Julie's commitment and service to our community is longstanding and diverse. As a partner in the firm, she has continued the legacy of HKP Architects, with the values of honesty, simplicity and service. The firm's history of providing architectural design that is of high-value, environmentally responsible and sensitive to its site is already evident in the planning and design work that Julie and the firm are doing on the exciting Mount Vernon Library Commons project.

Business of the Year: Skagit Valley Food Co-op

The Co-op has not been immune to the challenges that all businesses have faced over the last two years. But despite those difficulties, they have continued to be the vital anchor for business in our downtown with values and principles that go beyond the bottom line. Tony White took the reins of the organization as general manager at the beginning of 2020, of course not aware of what was ahead. His strong leadership, very much characterized by a team approach, has been vital for the Co-op.



Get to Know Cascadia Eye

Cascadia Eye's CEO Sheri Saldivar likes to think of her team as "the eye-care people for our neighborhoods."

She said that became abundantly clear during the early days of the pandemic shutdown when she was one of the few employees at Cascadia Eye answering phones while the company was essentially shut down. Medical professionals, especially nurses, were calling in looking for contact lenses – so they didn't have to worry about their glasses fogging up while constantly masked.

"We were 'that place' people came to in an emergency," Sheri said.

Cascadia Eye has been serving the Skagit community since 1985, when Sheri was the first employee hired at what was then North Cascade Eye Associates. Originally just the Mount Vernon location, the company has since grown to five locations, including Sedro-Woolley, Stanwood, Whidbey Island and Bellingham.

Operating in so many places requires lots of employees: "I think it surprises people that we employ 90 people," Sheri said. "Right now, we're fully staffed, which I'm very proud of."

Looking for a new pair of specs? You can find exclusive designs, some created by Sheri herself, at Cascadia's Optical Center. By designing and going direct to the manufacturer to produce the frames, Cascadia Eye can cut down on the cost for customers. And lenses for the eyewear is produced in-house at Cascadia's lab in Sedro-Woolley.

If you think of eye exams, glasses and contacts when you think of Cascadia Eye, that's only half the story. Cascadia Eye also has a full surgical



Two members of Cascadia Eye's optical staff. They are among 90 employees at the company.

and medical staff including cataract and corneal surgeons, a glaucoma specialist and an ophthalmic plastic surgeon, among other specialties.

"We are the only full-service eye care provider that's locally and independently owned," Sheri adds.

Cascadia Eye's commitment to its local communities is demonstrated through Cascadia Eye's good works, including three "Excellence in Education" scholarships awarded to local high school seniors each year and an eye exam clinic for uninsured/underinsured members of the community taking place this month.

Taking the commitment globally, Eyewitness Missions is a nonprofit organization started by Cascadia Eye's Dr. Siapco and Dr. Pereira that treats the eyes of those in impoverished countries.

To learn more about Cascadia Eye's services, products, staff and philanthropies, visit www.ncascade.com.

Member reveals return on investment

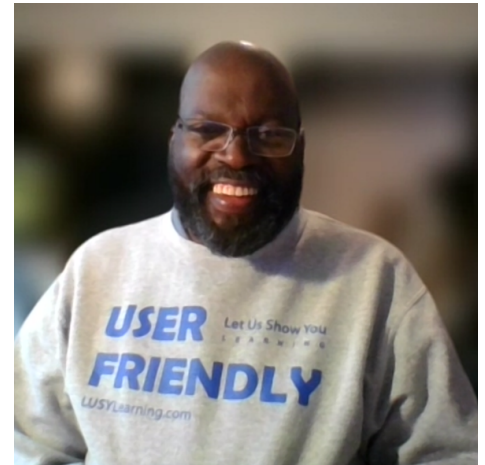
Reflections on a year with the Chamber

There are as many reasons for starting a business as there are people willing to take the risk. In my case, it was the thought of so many years of experience going to waste while I was watching daytime television. Whatever reason people have for striking out on their own, starting a business can be a lonely and frightening place. There is so much to do and so many details to attend to. The more you explore the idea of becoming an entrepreneur, the more there seems to be to learn.

Fortunately, I've found the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce. Amid the swirl of forms, laws and requirements needed to start a business, you also have to do the simple things, like meet people, share your ideas and perhaps make a real connection with someone who is looking for the kind of product or service you're offering. I was lost in this part of running my business. The idea of cold calling and blanket mailers was not appealing at all. Thankfully, I was invited to a Chamber mixer where I met Silvia Reed for the first time.

Silvia introduced me to other entrepreneurs and business principals who could help turn my idea into an enterprise. I was connected to networking groups and invited to participate in after-hours events that allowed me access to a host of potential customers and new friends. I will be forever grateful for the kind attention and great connections I have enjoyed being a part of the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce. Running a business is still overwhelming, but at least this part of my business is covered. I am more connected than I could ever have imagined.

Thank you Silvia and the team at the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce.



Brian Williams
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Member Announcements

Lincoln Theatre outlines COVID policies

“We care deeply about the health and safety of our patrons, artists, staff, volunteers and community,” says the Lincoln Theatre’s Roger Gietzen. “As such, we have been working with state and local health officials, our board of directors, members and performers to enact policies with the goal of keeping everyone safe.”

To attend an event at the Lincoln Theatre, all patrons are required to provide a valid photo ID along with proof of full COVID-19 vaccination. Patrons under the age of 5 are exempt from these requirements so long as they are with fully vaccinated adults. All staff, volunteers and patrons age 5 and older are required to wear masks inside the Lincoln Theatre, except while actively eating or drinking. Ticket holders unable to comply with the COVID-19 protocols will be given a full refund upon request prior to the event. No refunds will be issued after the performance.

McIntyre Hall requires vaccination or negative COVID test

McIntyre Hall PACC requires ALL persons provide photo ID and proof of negative test or vaccination for entry to McIntyre Hall. Individuals unable to be fully vaccinated, including children, must have proof of a negative COVID test (taken within 48-72 hours of performance). McIntyre Hall will check for proof of vaccination/negative COVID tests at the doors as a condition of entry. MASKS ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL PERSONS ENTERING MCINTYRE HALL regardless of vaccination status. The protocols currently in place are subject to change in compliance with revisions to national and local guidelines regarding COVID-19.

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Chamber/VIC office hours update

We remain closed to the public due to the high number of COVID-19 cases in the community. We are monitoring those numbers on a weekly basis, and will reopen to the public just as soon as we feel it's safe.

In the meantime, we are conducting business and ready to serve you. Call (360) 428-8547 or visit our [staff page](#) online for email addresses.



Congratulations Robert! He won a gift certificate to The Lunchbox Diner by shopping local. We'll be announcing the Shop Local grand prize winner soon!

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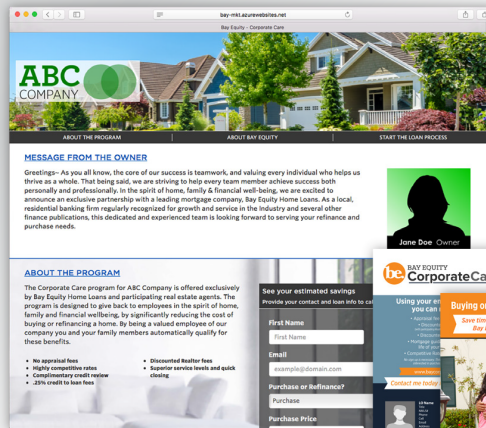


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