

Community Relations

The Mt. Adams chamber is always ready to promote business and tourism on west end of Klickitat County

By Jeanie Senior



Manager Marsha Holliston says the Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce is returning to its roots as a business advocate.

Marsha Holliston, manager of the Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce for about a year, jokes that she is “just kind of manager by default.”

She was hired four years ago to handle member services for the chamber, which represents businesses in western Klickitat County, and also provides tourism services for the area.

“That went really well,” she says.

When her co-worker moved on to another job, the chamber board named Marsha director.

Previously, she had spent eight years with the Advanced Navigation and Positioning Corp., a Hood River tech company. She started there as receptionist and advanced to handling configuration management and document control.

At the chamber, “membership is definitely growing,” Marsha says, noting it is at 223, up from 190 four years ago. “I don’t think it’s anything I’ve done. It’s just that businesses are more aware of the chamber. It’s more visible.”

The chamber offices and tourist information center are housed in a decade-old building at the edge of the park and ride lot next to Washington State Route 14, just west of the Hood River bridge.

A recent remodeling project spiffed up the space so it’s more attractive and user-friendly.

With the work completed around



the office, Marsha says more locals are stopping by in addition to tourists to pick up trip planning materials and information.

The Mt. Adams chamber and many other chambers of commerce across the United States “are getting back to their original purpose: that’s being business advocates,” she says.

The local group is led by a board of directors that is “just unbelievable, extremely proactive, really setting goals and following through,” Marsha adds.

Although the Mt. Adams chamber also has to manage tourism, that’s more of a summer focus.

“One thing I like about winter is there’s less tourism, so the chamber has a great opportunity to concentrate on its members, with education, getting classes going and making them aware of what’s out there to help them out,” Marsha says. “If someone has a need, we do our best to fix them up with a mentor. If they’re having problems with collections, say, the chamber would do its best to provide someone to help.”

Marsha is intent on getting to know members.



Left, Marsha at the brochure racks inside the chamber office in White Salmon. Below, felt coin purses Marsha designed.

“Just to find out what they lack or what they need,” she says. “This is what we’re doing as a chamber, helping them thrive, or just keep their head above water at this time.”

“This year, due to the economy, I’m really trying to work with them. Our base membership is \$125. If anyone is struggling, I’m really working with them on a payment plan. I don’t care if it’s \$5 a month. I really feel strongly if they can’t pay, it’s the worst time to drop them. It would be cold to drop them when they need the chamber the most.”

For the hardest hit businesses, Marsha says, she’s prepared to let them have a year’s free membership with board approval.

Born in Sanford, Maine, and raised in Laconia, New Hampshire, Marsha moved to the Columbia Gorge 36 years ago from Hartford, Connecticut.

Her husband, Bob, grew up in White Salmon.

“It takes a special person to enjoy the East Coast, and he didn’t—the humidity of summer, the cold of winter,” Marsha says. “He asked if I wanted to move out here and I did. Moving here that long ago from a big East Coast city was, I can tell

you, culture shock. I asked, ‘Where’s the butcher, where’s the deli?’”

The Hollistons raised a son, Jason, who lives in the Portland area and does software quality assurance.

Bob, a building contractor, is building his second airplane; he also restored an amphibious plane a few years ago.

“He’s a really good pilot,” Marsha says. “He’s won quite a few races.”

In her free time, Marsha likes to create with fabric.

She says self-deprecatingly that she’s “a fiber artist, kinda sorta.”

Her creations combine fabric and found metal objects.

“I love working with rust,” she says.

Marsha also uses felt, embroidery, lace, beads and buttons to decorate fanciful little purses, bracelets and flash drive holders, which she sells at Collage of the Gorge in White Salmon.

Marsha, who retains her New England accent after almost four decades living in the gorge, looks back on the changes since she moved to White Salmon.

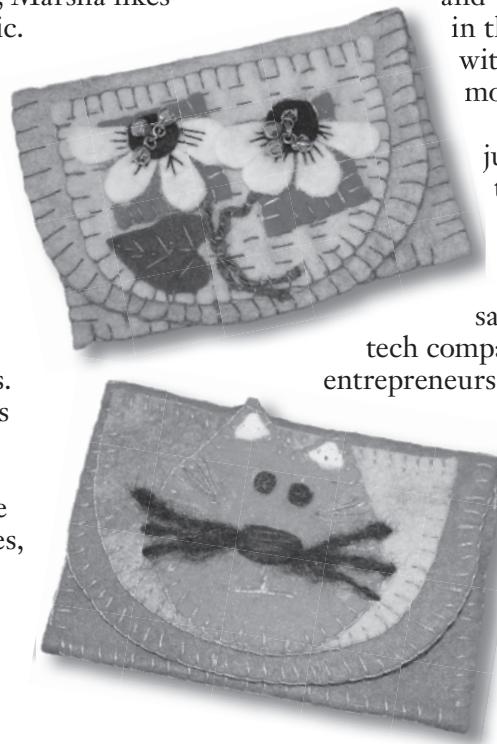
“I think the difference is that now we have delis and a butcher shop,” she jokes.

“Seeing it modernized has been a real trip,” she adds. “I know when I first moved here I thought it was a cute little Western town. Seeing it go from that to the Bavarian theme,

now, the nice earthy colors the buildings are being painted, I think is just lovely.”

In recent years, the area has received a boost from the high-tech companies on both sides of the Columbia, such as Insitu and Advanced Navigation and Positioning Systems, and the employees they attract: younger people who are community minded and who get involved in the school systems with an influx of more students.

“I think that’s just a wonderful thing, to start seeing more children,” Marsha says. “High-tech companies and entrepreneurs have really changed the face of the entire gorge, and the lifestyle is attracting a lot of younger people here. I just see growth, wonderful growth.” ■



The Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors includes Jim Kacena, a local attorney who specializes in real estate; Jerry Stockwell of Husum Highlands B&B; Karalee Chabotte, manager of First Independent Bank; Kelly Sawyer of North Shore Wine Sellers; Lorena Lowell of Bambino’s; Mary Margaret Evans of Insitu; Paul Doty of High School Pharmacy; and Lorraine Lyons of Gorge Life Financial, who is chamber president.