



Greater Goldendale Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Dana Peck says he has never regretted moving to Klickitat County in the 1990s.

Restoring Goldendale's Economic Strength

Dana Peck says he is happy to call Klickitat County home, and that he wants to help the Goldendale area bring businesses back

By Jeanie Senior

Dana Peck, executive director of the Greater Goldendale Area Chamber of Commerce, describes himself as a devoted Klickitat County convert.

When he arrived in the early 1990s, he was working for a large wind power corporation. He still recalls crossing the Biggs Bridge, driving up US 97, coming over the hill and getting his first look at Goldendale and the surrounding landscape.

"I've never fallen out of love with the place," he says.

When the wind corporation he worked for went bankrupt, he decided to stay.

"I wasn't really ready to leave the

area," Dana says. "I lucked into an economic development job with the county, and later became economic development director for eight years.

"I'm sure it sounds just totally corny, but I never regretted the decision to live in Goldendale. There was never a part I didn't just totally enjoy."

When Dana left the county position for another job in the wind power industry, he kept Goldendale as his home base. He and his wife, Carrie, who was education director at Maryhill Museum, raised their son in Goldendale.

The passing years have provided him with a solid perspective on the changing local economy.

Arriving in 1993, "I missed Goldendale being a boomtown," he says, referring



Left, Cascade Cliffs Vineyards is one of many successful vineyards in the area helping to boost the economy and provide employment. Above, mosaics, sculptures and weavings by local artists are part of a revolving exhibit at Chamber of Commerce offices.

Vineyard photo courtesy of Cascade Cliffs Vineyards

to an era marked by a plethora of well-paying jobs, thanks to a local aluminum smelter and a busy timber sector that included four sawmills.

“It all went downhill at the same time,” Dana says. “Goldendale was really kind of the economic center of the county, with car dealers and a Sears store. That all just went away. The economic base got kicked out from under it.”

The present picture is much brighter.

“The thing that folks who live here don’t fully appreciate is how well the county as a whole is doing,” Dana says. “In the few last years, we’re starting to get a sense that something’s improving, something’s going on.”

Funded jointly by the city, the county and members’ dues, the chamber of commerce focuses not only on tourism marketing, but on economic development and business/community relations.

Dana says the website created by Nicole Lundin, a new resident with extensive skills in web-based marketing, has increased the chamber’s presence online.

There is a sharpened focus on motor

sports, and inviting car and motorcycle clubs and cycling groups to tour the county’s scenic roads, sample wine and check out the Goldendale Observatory.

The chamber is looking at package deals with lodging and food to encourage longer stays.

“We’re slowly but surely learning how to market to these guys,” Dana says.

He says one factor driving the healthier economy is thousands of acres in the county’s east end being planted to vineyards. Klickitat County grapes are the foundation of several prize-winning wines.

“They’re knocking them dead with what they’re growing,” Dana says of local vineyards. “It’s a phenomenally high-value agricultural crop.”

The burgeoning acreage planted to vineyards means the county “is well on the way to being first in the state in wine grapes acreage,” Dana says.

He notes vineyards employ a lot of full-time workers. Expanding wine grape acreage means an opportunity for the partnership that links the chamber, the city and the county to capitalize on that job growth.

In the west end of the county, “they have this wildly improbable aerospace presence just going gangbusters,” Dana says. “Look what they’ve got going down there—a global center of UAV resource development and manufacturing.”

Dana is not looking to see a drone factory opening in Goldendale, but as chamber of commerce director, he sees many reasons for west end employees to move their families east: “cheaper land values, a terrific small town with a good school system, an expanding, updated hospital—those are things that you can really sell.”

Dana also can see the agricultural jobs from the vineyards generating a transition into an agricultural community with a different focus, “not abandoning ranchers or cattlemen, but grafting wine onto that.”

He says his goal is a thriving and healthy town residents can be proud of, and something older generations can appreciate.

“If you brought back the great-granddads, they would say, ‘Hey, you pulled it off,’ not, ‘My God, what did you do to my Goldendale?’” ■