

September 2011

Community In Action

A newsletter for friends of the Opportunity Council



"This new Resource Center can be a catalyst for positive change in the local community," said Dave Finet, OC executive director. "It is just the first in what will be a series of efforts to help meet peoples needs in becoming more self sufficient."

New facility provides easier access to services New Resource Center

After many years of planning and community support, the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRC) building is ready to open with a ribbon-cutting celebration Thursday, September 22, at 11:00 am.

The new resource center is located at 8251 Kendall Road on approximately 9 acres of donated land in the Columbia Valley. It will provide family support and health services, transportation and other services to a fast growing but geographically isolated community in Eastern Whatcom County.

"We're pleased to celebrate the opening of this long-awaited community center where families can access basic needs and education programs in their neighborhood instead of having to drive to Bellingham," said Laurie Caskey Schreiber, OC board president and past Whatcom County Councilwoman.

The Opportunity Council will manage the facility and provide early childhood education and family support through a Head Start Program. Dee West, OC's Early Learning And Family

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Needs assessment presents snapshot of people living near the poverty level in our community

Prosperity Project data will improve delivery of OC services

A new 2011 community needs assessment and report is now available on the Opportunity Council web site, www.oppco.org/news.

The "Prosperity Project" report includes data from Whatcom, Island and San Juan county residents about basic services including housing, health, food, transportation, child care, and employment. This information will be used to improve service coordination, increase access, and help prioritize resource allocation.

"These findings represent the perspective and opinions of people living at or near the poverty level in our community," said Greg Winter, project manager and director of the Whatcom Homeless Service Center. "One of the key findings is knowing what consumers identify as most

important and also most difficult to access."

Thank you to United Way of Whatcom County; Whatcom Community Foundation; Island County Human Services; San Juan County Health and Community Services; and OC's Early Learning and Family Services Department for the funding needed to produce this report. »

It looks like we're in for a long haul

During one of the worst economic periods since the depression of the 1930s, our state and federal legislators continue to struggle with budget cuts and deficits.

For people out of work or on limited incomes, the future is especially worrisome. Even though more people need help, cuts are being made to basic services such as energy bill assistance, general assistance unemployable (GAU), and emergency home repair.

This is where you and I can make a difference. We can pitch in to help our friends and neighbors stay housed, have enough food to eat, pay their electricity bill and gain employment.

To do this, we're getting ready to embark on one of our biggest fundraising drives ever. Our goals are to help families meet their basic needs now during these tough times, and also create a stronger community so we are less reliant on state and federal funding in the future.

We're asking for help with three primary goals:

Primary Goal No. 1:

Help seniors and vulnerable residents maintain housing and independent living.

Affordable housing is one of the most pressing problems today. While developing new affordable housing is important, we need to make sure we're not overlooking people who are at risk of losing their homes or families who live in deteriorating, unhealthy homes.

In particular, many of our senior residents are at risk of losing their home because they can't afford the maintenance and utility bills.

Helping people stay in their homes is a wise investment. Everyone benefits when we maintain and repair homes in our existing neighborhoods. It helps stabilize people's lives, creates jobs and preserves affordable housing.

Primary Goal No. 2:

Increase early learning opportunities so every child can be successful.

When we prepare children to start school ready to learn, we are giving them an opportunity to be successful in life. Unfortunately, not every child has this opportunity.

Many children begin life with risk factors that are overwhelming. In Washington state, 23 percent of all children age 0-5 have two or more of these risk factors, poverty being the most prevalent. Early Head Start helps children in families who are low income, but it only reaches only 3 percent of all eligible 0- to 3-year-olds in Washington state.

We can do better than that.

Investing in these youngest residents is one of the smartest investments we can make. When children are given an opportunity to succeed, they grow up to be less dependent on future government assistance. Researchers say this is because such programs help children improve their thinking skills, do better in school and develop socially.

Primary Goal No. 3:

Everyone should have a place to live. It's difficult to hold down a job, go to school or stay healthy if you don't have a safe, warm



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Dave Finet
Executive Director

3 primary goals

Goal #1

Help seniors and vulnerable residents maintain housing and independent living.

Goal #2

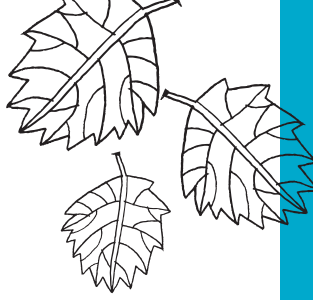
Increase early learning opportunities so every child can be successful.

Goal #3

Provide everyone a place to live.

The Opportunity Council is your community action agency. Our mission is to act as a catalyst for positive change, both in the community and in the lives of the people we serve in Island, San Juan, and Whatcom counties.

Community Partners



Whatcom Asset Building Coalition offers new financial literacy seminars at WorkSource

Learning how to make ends meet

Many families and individuals are making tough financial choices right now because they have recently been laid off from work or have exhausted their unemployment benefits.

To help people address these economic challenges, the Whatcom Asset Building Coalition (WABC) is partnering with WorkSource to provide "On the Money" training seminars.

This curriculum was designed by WABC members, including Opportunity Council, Washington Educational Credit Union, Goodwill, LAW Advocates, and Northwest Justice Project. Staff and volunteers from these organizations lead the weekly seminars. Training topics are Prioritizing Your Spending, How to Avoid Banking Fees, Unveiling the Credit Mystery, Debt & Bankruptcy, and Finances in a Crisis. »

"On the Money" seminars are offered at WorkSource every Thursday from 1:00 to 2:30 pm and are open to anyone who wishes to attend.

We are also looking for volunteers to lead a seminar once every five weeks. Contact Caitlin Quigley, (360) 734-5121 x 232 to volunteer.

The Whatcom Asset Building Coalition (WABC) supports financial self-sufficiency through education and advocacy. It is one of 19 Asset Building Coalitions in Washington state and a member of the Washington Asset Building Coalition. Its mission is to foster collaboration in the community to increase the financial stability of low-income people in Whatcom County. Visit www.whatcomabc.org to learn more. »

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New facility offers easier access to services

Services director, has been involved with this project for nearly seven years and worked to help develop a beautiful learning environment. A food bank, community meeting rooms and a Whatcom County Sheriffs office station are also planned.

The EWRRRC will be built in phases. The total budget for Phase One is about \$4 million dollars. Funding included \$1.75 million from the state that the Legislature approved four years ago, \$2.13 million from a state sales tax rebate to build rural county public facilities and a \$1 million federal grant that was awarded in 2008 to support community centers and development in rural areas. »

Dine Out helps fund Maple Alley Inn expansion

The Opportunity Council's annual fundraiser, Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn, held on May 3, raised close to \$24,000 to help provide more hot meals for people in need.

"We're grateful to all the participating Dine Out restaurants and the supporters who dined out or contributed to make this a great success. This helps us continue our hot lunch service and this year it also helps us expand meal services," said Debbie Paton, Opportunity Council Community Services Director.

An additional meal is now available at Maple Alley Café which serves breakfast Tuesday at 9:30 am at St. Paul's Episcopal Church Old Parish Hall, 2117 Walnut. Maple Alley Inn hot meals are still served at Faith Lutheran Church on McLeod Rd. in Bellingham on Wednesday and Thursday at 11:30 am.

2011 Dine Out sponsors include The Bellingham Herald, Cascade Radio Group, Whatcom Educational Credit Union, Bellingham Cold Storage and Lithtex NW.



Thanks to a new partnership with St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Maple Alley Inn (MAI) expanded meal service in June by adding a breakfast Tuesday mornings at St. Paul's old parish hall on Walnut Street, Bellingham. Local support, including the annual "Dine Out" event, helped make this expansion possible.

This new meal service is in addition to the regular Maple Alley Inn lunches served Wednesdays and Thursdays at Faith Lutheran Church on McLeod Road in Bellingham.



Assessments net from 20 to 30 percent household energy savings Community Energy Challenge celebrates first year numbers



The Community Energy Challenge (CEC) celebrated the completion of 500 home energy assessments at an event August 15, 5:00 pm at the Boundary Bay Brewery in Bellingham. CEC

Program staff, contractors, and participating households and businesses attended and celebrated this achievement which included helping more than 200 local homes complete energy efficiency retrofits.

The CEC is a Whatcom County program that helps local homes and businesses save energy and money through low-cost energy assessments and personalized recommendations, has cause for celebration.

“We opened the doors for this program just over one year ago,” says Shawn Collins, the CEC Program manager with the Opportunity Council. “In that time, we have helped 500 homeowners make smart decisions about how to cut their energy costs. Along the way we have helped get a lot

of people to work and given a needed boost to our local economy. We’re proud of this achievement.”

The CEC has found potential annual savings of \$200-\$400, or 20-30 percent of energy costs, per home. As for local businesses, 74 have signed up so far and are finding the potential for an average of \$500-\$1,000 in annual savings per business, or three to five percent of energy costs per year. The CEC also supports approximately 60 local construction sector jobs through demand for energy efficiency projects generated by the program.

The Community Energy Challenge is a collaboration between Sustainable Connections and the Opportunity Council. The program guides participants through a cost-effective energy efficiency makeover that includes a low-cost home energy assessment, work plan and quality assurance, financial incentives, and optional low-interest loans to help finance the work. »

Seniors may pre-apply for appointments

Energy Assistance available

Appointments for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) season will be available starting in November. Watch our web site and local newspapers for more information.

To help senior residents navigate the busy opening of LIHEAP, we are offering opportunities for seniors to pre-apply in Whatcom and Island Counties. Residents who are age 60 and over are invited to call the energy scheduling line Sept. 19-22 during normal energy scheduling line hours to make an energy appointment for the new season. »

For an energy assistance appointment, call:

(360) 255-2192 (Whatcom County)

(360) 679-6577 or 1-800-317-5427 (Island County)

Annual school supply drive assists low income children

Ready to learn

The Opportunity Council hosted annual Community School Supply Drives in August to help children who are homeless or in very low-income families. Businesses, organizations and individuals in Island and Whatcom counties made this another successful year by contributing backpacks, supplies and financial donations to help children start school prepared and excited to learn.

"The school supply drive is a great community service that helps many children and families get ready to start the school year prepared and ready to learn," said Anjali Englund, Outreach and Development Coordinator. "Contributions make a positive difference in the lives of homeless and low-income children in school districts throughout Whatcom and Island Counties. »

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In for a long haul

place to live. But not everyone in our community can meet this basic need. Each year we conduct a homeless count and confirm the numerous families and individuals in homeless situations. There's simply not enough housing to meet the need. We're committed to working with families to help them get housing. It provides a foundation for moving people toward self-sufficiency.

In spite of the considerable challenge these goals present, we also know we're lucky. We know people in our communities truly care about the well being of their neighbors and if they know how their donation will be used, they're willing to help out.

And there has never been a time in most of our lives when helping others was more important than right now. »

WHSC receives grant for veteran housing services

The Whatcom Homeless Service Center, a program at the Opportunity Council, is providing more housing services for veterans this fall due to a \$684,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The grant will provide services for veterans who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing. Opportunity Council is one of only two agencies in Washington State, and one of 85 grantees nationwide, to receive an award under the VA's new Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

"We are committed to ending veteran homelessness and this collaboration with the VA and community-based providers gets us one giant step closer to that goal," said Greg Winter, Director of the Homeless Service Center.

Through this new program, veterans will receive financial assistance plus services such as financial literacy training, credit counseling and other services linked to long-term housing stability. The grant is expected to serve 275 veteran households throughout a five-county region that includes Whatcom, Skagit, Island, Jefferson, and Clallam counties.

Opportunity Council will provide the services for this grant in Whatcom and Island counties and act as the lead agency with partners in neighboring counties that include Serenity House and Peninsula Housing Authority in Clallam County, OlyCap in Jefferson County, and Skagit Community Action Agency in Skagit County.

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The Opportunity Council is one of 30 community action programs (CAPs) around the state, working together to build health communities by eliminating poverty and improving people's lives. Our programs work to create positive change, both in the lives of the people we serve and in our community.

Our Community

John Davies is 2011 Environmental Hero

John Davies, director of the Opportunity Council's Building Performance Center, has been selected as one of RE Sources 2011 Environmental Heroes.



John Davies, Director of the OC's Building Performance Center

This award recognizes Davies for his long-standing work in residential energy conservation and improving living conditions for thousands of low income households. He has also worked to develop innovative energy programs, policies and standards. His work to develop the National Guidelines for the Home Energy Efficiency Retrofit Workforce was recognized by Vice President Joe Biden in 2010.

"John can be described as an environmental innovator, practitioner, teacher and leader," said Dave Finet, Opportunity Council Executive Director. "I cannot think of another person in our community who has made more of an environmental impact in so many different ways, from direct service and

social justice, to policy, to market transformation. I'm very pleased that he is being recognized as an environmental hero for his contributions."

As the Building Performance Center Director, Davies consults and trains with agencies, utilities, colleges, tribes, state and provincial governments from British Columbia to Oregon on energy efficiency program design and workforce training.

"Environmental Heroes" is an annual RE Sources award that honors individuals who work tirelessly on behalf of our environment and advocate sustainability for our community. Davies will receive this award on Bellingham September 17 at an awards banquet that will feature speaker Denis Hayes, President of the Bullitt Foundation, an internationally recognized leader in environmental and energy policy and Time Magazine's "Hero of the Planet." »



Margaret Lyons talks about Weatherization plus Health services while being interviewed by Sam Nuttmann of Session 7 Media for a documentary on DOE's Weatherization plus Health initiative produced by NASCSP (National Association For State Community Services Programs).

Our Donors

Thank you!
Thank you!
Many Thanks!
Thank you!

Golfers raise \$11,000 to support OC's homeless services **Go FORE! Good tournament**

Thanks to many golfers and sponsors, the Opportunity Council's annual "Golf FORE! Good" tournament Aug. 12 raised over \$11,000 (net) to support homeless housing programs and services.

Sponsors include: The Unity Group, Regence Insurance, Puget Sound Energy, Cascade Natural Gas, ConocoPhillips, Prostock Athletic Supply, North Cascade Cardiology, Kelly's O'Deli, Valley Plumbing & Electric, Overhead Door Co., American Family Insurance, Special T Signs, Western Forest Products, Stromberg & Stromberg, Lithtex NW, IMCO, Oasys, Inc., Windermere, Mt. Baker Roofing, OC Community Energy Challenge, People's Bank, Lithex NW, S&S Concrete Construction, ServPro of Bellingham, Boundary Bay Brewery, and Robinson Hardwood & Homes.

Major donors since our last newsletter include: Lummi Indian Business Council contributed a \$10,000 grant to support Community Services programs. U.S. Bancorp Foundation awarded a \$5,000 grant to our Maple Alley Inn and job training program. Kiwanis Club of Bellingham and Whatcom Educational Credit Union both contributed to support our Early Learning & Family Services early learning programs. Fairhaven Lions contributed to support our Dorothy Place facility. Maple Alley Inn major supporters include Ferndale High School ASB, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle. We also appreciate Island County support from: First United Methodist Church, Whidbey Presbyterian Church, and Windermere Foundation Trust. We appreciate all the community support for our school supply drive, including major donors TechAdapt, Toolhouse Design Company, Industrial Credit Union and St. James Presbyterian Church.

Other major donors since our last newsletter include: United Way of Whatcom County, Paul Reavley and Denise Weeks, Whatcom Community Foundation (Meg Metzger Fund), David Finet & Vicki Lippiatt, Sue Cameron, John Davies, Stephen Gockley and Ellen Posel.

Your gift helps our community weather tough economic times

Since 1965, Community Action has been a vital part of life in the Pacific Northwest, providing local solutions to local needs. For the past 45 years, your Community Action Agency, the Opportunity Council, has been "helping people, changing lives."

Your contributions help us provide shelter, heat and care for people in our community today.

Name (s) _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State/Zip _____

Email Address _____ Phone _____

Check: Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift for \$30 \$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 Other ____
Please make checks payable to the Opportunity Council

Credit Card: \$30 \$50 \$100 \$200 \$500 Other _____

Card number _____ Exp. Date: ____/____ VISA MasterCard

Signature _____

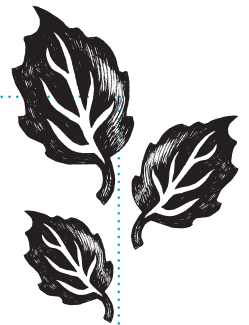
Your contribution can be mailed to the Opportunity Council administrative offices at 1111 Cornwall Ave., Bellingham, Washington 98225
Call for more information (360) 734-5121, ext. 333

Friends of the Opportunity Council are appreciated and may be publicly recognized.

Please check here if you prefer to remain anonymous.



OC's "Golf FORE! Good" tournament raised over \$11,000 to support homeless housing programs and services.



Opportunity Council programs include: Community Resource Center • Homeless Housing • Dorothy Place • Marjie's House • Homeless Prevention • Rental Assistance • Child Care • Nutrition • Basic Food Education & Outreach • Maple Alley Inn • Community Voice Mail • Community Jobs • Energy Assistance • Weatherization Home Repair Loan Program • Child Care Resource & Referral • Early Support for Infants and Toddlers • Emergency Child Care • Collaboration for Children & Child Care Training • School Supply Bank • Head Start • Early Head Start • Early Childhood Education Assistance Program • Building Performance Center • The Energy Project • Conservation Education • Community Energy Challenge



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Contributors to this issue include Dave Finet, Laurie Caskey Schreiber, Greg Winter, Anjali Englund, Debbie Paton, Lorena Shah, Caitlin Quigley, Shawn Collins.

Editing by Sheri Emerson, Kathy Washatka and Martha Border.

For mailing address changes, newsletter submissions and comments, please contact: phone (360) 734-5121.

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Upcoming events

Sept 22 East Whatcom Regional Resource Center Opening Ceremony, 11:00 am

8251 Kendall Road, Kendall

For information, call 360-734-5121, ext. 304

Oct 12 Social Service Candidate Forum, 5:30 pm

Bellingham Municipal Court building, 2014 C Street, Bellingham
Candidates in Whatcom County and City of Bellingham races will have an opportunity to respond to questions about local human services and needs.

For more information, call 360-734-5121, ext. 301

NEW! Dorothy Place Online Fundraising event coming in November.

Join us online to raise support for this vital program.

For more information, call 360-734-5121, ext. 233

Nov 11 Veterans Day, Opportunity Council offices closed

Nov 24/25 Thanksgiving, Opportunity Council offices closed

