



Celebrating 60 years serving our communities!

Bellingham Herald, Sunday, January 17, 1965 3

Commissioners Back Program To Battle Poverty Locally

The Whatcom County Commissioners have given their backing to organizing a county-wide program aimed at combatting poverty under the "Great Society" concept. The Bellingham City Council is expected to follow suit.

Creation of an "Opportunity Council" to attack the poverty problem is one of the terms of a resolution of agreement signed by the county board Friday afternoon following a conference with representatives of the Bellingham council and the state Dept. of Public Assistance. Commission Chairman Henry Halverson said he understands the City Council will act on the resolution Monday night.

The resolution was presented to city council members two weeks ago. It was drawn up by a special committee of the Whatcom County UGN organization which had been asked to study the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (President Johnson's anti-poverty bill) and to make suggestions "to integrate the effect of the act into the social, economic, educational, governmental and cultural structure of Whatcom County and its cities and towns in the most efficient and effective manner."

The resolution organizes a joint program and includes these objectives of the Opportunity Council:

- Mobilization of public and private resources to attack poverty.
- Organization, financing and advancement of a community action program to meet the requirements of the federal act.
- Recruitment of sponsorship and participation by groups to

be served and by organizations which have shown a concern with poverty problems.

It says the Opportunity Council "shall have full authority to determine its own policies, organization and activities . . . subject to submission of specific programs and financial participation for approval of the government bodies who sign the resolution."

Opportunity Council membership will be open to "all groups and individuals able to demonstrate their intention and ability to assist in carrying out" the above-mentioned objectives.

The resolution also provides that the various local legislative bodies signing it are to appoint a "pilot group" to undertake preliminary leadership and to organize the Opportunity Council until officers are elected.

The special UGN committee reported: "In a highly organized society such as that present in Whatcom County, a groan of despair will greet another organization piled on top of existing ones . . . (But) The need is great enough and the resources are great enough to recommend this to every body of citizens in this community."

On Jan. 17, 1965, the Bellingham Herald newspaper announced the creation of "an Opportunity Council." We're so glad to be part of our communities, which now span multiple counties.

As we continue into 2025, we may not know everything that lies ahead of us, but we still have much to celebrate. This year marks the 60th anniversary of opening our doors at Opportunity Council!

This milestone offers us a moment to celebrate the path that brought us here. It's a chance to honor the work of those who came before us and to recognize the incredible dedication each of you brings to carrying this legacy forward.

When Opportunity Council was founded in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty, it was inspired by the principles of the civil rights movement—a movement rooted in justice, equity, and the belief that everyone deserves equal opportunity and access to the resources needed to thrive. Community Action Agencies like ours were created to be part of this larger vision: building communities where everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, has the chance to succeed.

Each of you—every staff member, volunteer, board member, and

donor—is part of a long line of dedicated individuals who have worked tirelessly to serve our neighbors and strengthen our community. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and together, we are shaping a future that our founders could only dream of.

As we honor this legacy, we have exciting plans to celebrate and share our story throughout the year, including our Anniversary Gala in October.

Please save the date for Saturday, October 25—an inspiring evening reflecting on all we've accomplished together!



Rafael and the HOT Team are carrying on the 60-year tradition of service to the community

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Sixty years ago, Opportunity Council was founded on a simple but powerful belief: that in a just and caring society, every person should have the chance to build a better future. Today, that belief remains as vital as ever.

Much like the period we were founded in, we are facing a perilous and unpredictable time—30% of our budget comes directly or indirectly from federal funding. Most of that goes straight to keeping the heat on, a roof overhead, and food on the table for children, families, older adults, and Veterans facing hard times. With so much of our community safety net at risk, I am forced to admit that I truly don't know what this year holds for us. It is an uncertainty that can be demoralizing and frightening, yet our staff and volunteers continue to show up every day with dedication and compassion.

Their commitment—your commitment—is what keeps hope alive in our community.

Thank you for being part of our history and the cornerstone of our shared belief in a stronger, more equitable future. Together, we continue down the high road of hope and prosperity, ensuring that opportunity is not just a word—but a promise.

With gratitude,

Greg Winter

THE WAY STATION: A SAFE PLACE FOR REST AND RECUPERATION

This spring, our Whatcom Homeless Service Center and [PeaceHealth](#) will open the medical respite side of the Way Station so that instead of being discharged from the hospital to the streets, people experiencing homelessness will get the care and respite they need through health care and access to service providers.

P.S. The showers and laundry side of the [Way Station](#) is currently open, run by [Unity Care NW](#). Everyone deserves the dignity of being clean, and we're grateful to partner with folks making that happen!

Greg Winter, Executive Director, and Marisa Schoepbach, Homeless Outreach Team and Way Station Medical Respite Manager, smile outside the Way Station.



A KIDDO'S CONTRIBUTION: GIDEON'S GIFT

Sarahbeth, an Opportunity Council board member whose family was part our early learning programs, shared: "Part of being Jewish is the tradition of putting money into a box called the Tzedakah box, a symbol of righteousness and charity. [My son] Gideon asked a lot of questions about where the money goes and, when I explained it would help his old preschool, he went to get his piggy bank and added change to help his preschool class and Teacher Amy."



8-year-old Gideon and his family

"He's 8 years old but still loves his teacher and wants to help so other kids can have a good time like he did. From supporting us when we were unhoused to helping with diagnoses, transitioning Gideon to a G-tube, emotional and physical supports, and housing, OC's programs helped Gideon get to where he is today!"

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SEVERE WEATHER SHELTER VOLUNTEERS HELP BRING WARMTH TO OUR COMMUNITY


217
VOLUNTEER
SHIFTS


4,500+
MEALS
SERVED

We're so grateful for our volunteers who helped keep people safe and warm at the Bellingham Severe Weather Shelter in partnership with Whatcom County Health and Community Services. At Lutheran Community Services Northwest (the site of the shelter), volunteers prepared and served hot food, helped guests check in and out of the shelter, supported trash pickup, and more. Throughout the winter, volunteers worked 217 shifts and served over 4,500 meals to shelter guests!

Here are just a few of the many dedicated folks who supported shelter operations through our Whatcom Volunteer Center.



RUDY THE WONDER DOG

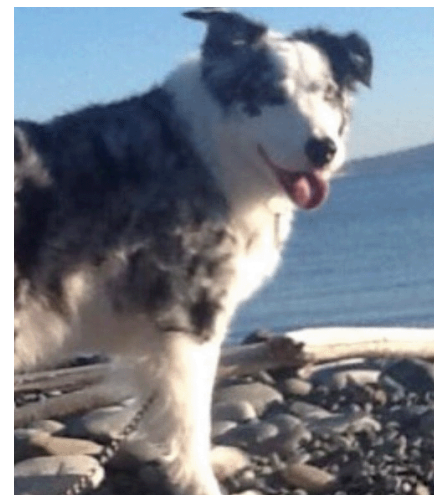
Carol had already lost her husband. She couldn't imagine his dog Rudy, her only source of comfort, leaving her, too.

"The thought of it all was too much to bear," she said.

But Rudy was given a second chance at life when the Island County Resource Center helped pay for the procedure he needed. Carol

was overwhelmed with gratitude. The unthinkable possibility that Rudy wouldn't make it was lifted from her mind.

"It brought me to tears," she said. "You guys do the work of angels."



Rudy enjoys island life while hanging out at the beach.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: URSULA DEWITT



Few of the people still involved with Opportunity Council remember the start of Maple Alley Inn more than thirty-five years ago, but Ursula DeWitt certainly does.

Since the doors first opened in 1981, Ursula has volunteered regularly with her sister Gretchen. At first, she wasn't sure what to expect, and says what surprised her most about volunteering is just how happy it makes her. "After a while, you get to know people and they become your friends," she now says.

"I want to know what happens in their lives and hear all their stories."

Anyone in need of good company and a hot, healthy, sustaining meal is welcome to visit Maple Alley Inn every Wednesday and Thursday at 11:30 am at Faith Lutheran Church in Bellingham. Today, this long-standing program partner houses the kitchen, dining room, and vegetable garden but the program didn't start there—it started in a basement.

Assuming the name of the program is "Maple Valley Inn" is a common mistake, but the program name is actually a tribute to the first address

of the program: Maple Street in Bellingham. Founded at First Presbyterian Church, the entrance to the dining area was originally off the Maple Street alley—thus the name "Maple Alley Inn." Ursula still remembers all the way back to the beginning of the program: relying on donated food and the YWCA kitchen to prepare meals served out of the church basement.

Ursula has always liked volunteering, and Maple Alley Inn is no exception. She mans the lunch service cart—serving up coffee, tea, and hot chocolate to the meal guests, and loves chatting with everyone who comes to her looking to fill their cup.

"What I see are a lot of people happy to see each other, happy to have good food, and to meet up with their friends," she said.

When she's not volunteering, Ursula spends time with her grandkids, gardens, and travels. More than her sister, Ursula says Gretchen is her best friend and inspires her to volunteer. Our community is lucky enough to have both to inspire all of us.

Top: Ursula ready for conversation and her coffee cart. Below: Ursula poses with a fellow volunteer.



Want to feed folks and support volunteers like Ursula?

Check out our Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn event on [page 7](#) →

BUILDING BRIDGES TO RECOVERY

We're excited to see our partnerships with Ideal Option grow. Ideal Option is an organization whose clinics offer outpatient treatment for substance use disorder, has come to the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center. Their new clinic is inside the resource center and provides opioid treatment to combat addiction to fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine. Ideal Option also provides medication-assisted treatment for alcohol withdrawal and relapse prevention.

In rural East Whatcom County, it can be hard to find access to treatment for issues like substance abuse. Their medication-assisted treatment has been highly effective in reducing the use of these substances, coming at a crucial time during the fentanyl epidemic in Whatcom County and beyond.

We're also glad to be partnering with Ideal Option in Bellingham through two of our Permanent Supportive Housing programs. Their team member, Dawn, has been visiting 22 North and Dorothy Place community events to help introduce peer counseling to residents.



Dawn helps connect with 22 North tenants who want to embark on their recovery journey. We're so glad to have her visiting!

CLIMATE ACTION AND THE COMMUNITY ENERGY CHALLENGE

This February, Kris from our Home Improvement Department presented at a community learning session at the Bellingham Public Library. She shared with community members, students and activists about how the Community Energy Challenge supports homeowners and organizations in making achievable changes toward sustainability. During the event, the group discussed what's happening locally to protect the health of our community from climate change and how to process our own experiences as fuel for

action. It was wonderful to process and dream as a community about practical steps we can take to better the planet we call home.



Kris explains the ins and outs of sustainable energy choices for homes and businesses.

Dine Out Returns May 14–21

This year marks 25 years of Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn!

For years, Maple Alley Inn has been dedicated to serving healthy and sustaining meals and fighting hunger in Whatcom County. We serve a diverse community of low-income families, homeless Veterans, isolated seniors, and individuals in recovery.

These meals offer all that a family meal provides—a chance to come together, dine in dignity, offer companionship, and swap stories around the table.

And Maple Alley Inn is a great example of how, at Opportunity Council, we love helping people help people—many dedicated volunteers help cook and serve in the Maple Alley Inn kitchen every week. Some of these folks have been helping out since the beginning. Some have needed meals in the past and wanted to give back. Anyone is welcome at our table, and we're so glad to be able to empower folks to make a difference.

Dine Out is the perfect opportunity to help carry this momentum forward. Throughout Whatcom County, a few amazing restaurants will be donating a portion of sales during Dine Out week, hosting matching challenges, running round-up fundraisers, and more.

Eating out at participating locations during Dine Out week is a great way to build community over delicious food and drink, help our neighbors access nutritious meals, and boost local businesses, all at the same time!

Whether you want to grab a beer at Structures Brewing, try the legendary kimchi chicken sandwich at Brandywine Kitchen, feast on fresh seafood at Keenan's at the Pier, or enjoy another option—you'll be making a huge difference in our community.

OPPCO.ORG/DINEOUT

Events



**MAY
17**

Catherine Mahaffey East Whatcom Wellness Fair

10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
East Whatcom Regional
Resource Center,
8251 Kendall Rd, Maple Falls

A day of family fun converges with medical resources in remote East Whatcom. The whole family is invited to visit and enjoy free care, a free meal and a variety of wellness activities. Whether it's dental, vision (and glasses); kids wellness exams; help getting insurance set up; elder care; or even safe firearm storage training, residents can find typically hard-to-access wellness resources in one place.

- Medical, Dental, & Vision Services
- Pediatric Wellness Services
- Memory & Hearing Screening
- Insurance Information
- Community Services

Learn more at oppco.org/healthfair

Dine Out for Maple Alley Inn

Various Bellingham restaurants—
check out oppco.org/dineout for the full
list of participating locations.

For one week each May, local restaurants and community members come together to fight hunger in our community. By dining out or donating, you help provide hot, nutritious meals to neighbors in need through Maple Alley Inn, Opportunity Council's community meal program. Visit a participating restaurant during Dine Out week and add a \$5 donation to your bill to buy lunch for someone in need. Some restaurants also donate a portion of sales.



Visit oppco.org/dineout and click "Find a Restaurant" to make your Dine Out itinerary now!

**MAY
14-21**

Whatcom Asset Building Coalition Annual Summit

May 20 from 1-4 p.m.
(Doors open at 12:30)
Bellingham Cruise Terminal, 355 Harris Ave



Join the Whatcom Asset Building Coalition for their annual summit event, "Asset Building for All: Pathways to Financial Inclusion." We'll explore how individuals, families, and communities gather the resources that move them towards economic well-being and financial stability. Keynote and panelist sessions will cover affordable homeownership strategies, financial literacy, and pathways to education and job skills training.

Register at whatcomabc.org/events

**MAY
20**



Veterans' Stand Down

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
American Legion Post #7,
1688 W Bakerview Rd, Bellingham



At this resource fair, Veterans can come by for information and free essentials from Opportunity Council and American Legion Post #7. Organized for Veterans who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, it's an opportunity for guests to learn more about Housing, Health, Social, and Veterans' Services. Free meals are offered, as well as hygiene products, blankets and sleeping bags, boots, and more.

Sign up at oppco.org/standdown

**JUNE
6**

A COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY SERVING WHATCOM, ISLAND AND SAN JUAN COUNTIES SINCE 1965

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San Juan County

(800) 649-5121



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