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WASHINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (WEDA)

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Contact Information for Award Winners and Photos Available Upon Request

Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA) Celebrates Excellence in Economic Development with 2024 WEDA Economic Development Awards

Washington – The leaders of Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA), Washington’s only trade association laser-focused on economic development, awarded their 2024 Economic Development Awards on February 28 at their 2024 Winter Conference in Olympia/Lacey, WA. Professional photos are available upon request.

“WEDA’s Economic Development Awards celebrate outstanding achievement in economic development at the highest level,” said WEDA Board Chair Betty Capestany, who also serves as the Director of Economic Development for Pierce County. “There are leaders across our entire state working tirelessly to grow jobs and strengthen economic vitality in their communities. These awards honor leaders and projects that are excelling in this important work.”

Bruce Kendall, WEDA Awards Committee Chair who also serves as President & CEO of the Economic Development Board for Tacoma-Pierce County added, “We received a number of impressive nominations from communities across Washington. The nominations reflect a unique array of the breadth and diversity of strong work taking place by economic developers in Washington. These projects are often complex and require extensive collaboration and creative partnerships.”

2024 WEDA award winners recognized for outstanding achievement in Economic Development include:

2024 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Amanda Wallner

The Emerging Professional Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to his/her community, is a promising future leader in the industry, or who has become an integral member of his or her community, creating significant support for economic development.

“Mandy exemplifies the spirit of strong economic development strategies are based upon a collaboration and emphasis of building and promoting partnerships. Her work and efforts impact not just the community in which serves, but the entirety of the economic development network that builds a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive economy,” said Michael Cade, Executive Director of the Thurston Economic Development Council and WEDA Awards Committee member, “Mandy exemplifies partnership. She continuously offers her expertise and skills to further the success of all. As the City of Richland’s Economic Development Manager, she wears many hats and still finds time in her busy days to teach and recognize others. She continuously leverages her creativity to find new solutions that increase economic diversity.”

2024 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATES OF THE YEAR
Jenefeness Franke & Black-Owned Business Excellence (BOBE)

This award recognizes a person or group of people who made a significant and/or innovative contribution to an economic development project or program. This award recognizes that economic development professionals must rely on a whole host of others in order to be successful. These are sometimes the “silent heroes” of economic development who have contributed significantly to advancement of the economic development profession or were involved in a significant project in a creative way.

The WEDA Awards Committee selected Jenefeness Franke and the Black Owned Business Excellence (BOBE) as the Economic Development Advocates of the Year for their work to create an equitable ecosystem to propel the success of Black and other underserved populations in our state. During the pandemic, Jenefeness Franke recognized that a lot of BIPOC Business owners were being left out and left behind in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Her curiosity led her down a path to help create a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Washington state.

She and a few allies formed a collaborative, Black-Owned Business Excellence (BOBE), to educate, celebrate and normalize excellence in minority-owned businesses. They have led some transformational symposiums, conferences and celebrations leaving business owners in Washington in a much better financial position. Jenefeness is one of the original co-founders of BOBE and currently volunteers to provide strategic direction for the group. BOBE is a “For and By” organization that collaborates with different local minority-owned businesses, organizations and individuals who come together to support, educate, inspire, and elevate businesses that are owned by historically underserved business owners in Washington State.

Jenefeness and the other officers have spent countless volunteer hours spearheading the efforts of BOBE. BOBE’s mission is to drive positive change by actively contributing to the creation of a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Washington State. They are dedicated to championing Black-owned businesses, entrepreneurs, and innovators, working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to level the playing field and ensure equal access to resources, opportunities, and support.

Said Jenefeness Franke, “This award symbolizes the impact of our collaborative efforts to help create a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Washington state. From developing programs that educate and elevate new and existing entrepreneurs to creating systems that enhance time management and productivity during challenging times, our goal has always been to foster growth, sustainability, and resilience in Black businesses.”

2024 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Voltage Park

This award celebrates the successful creation or completion of a creative, economically significant, and/or model recruitment project in a community or region. Factors that may influence the selection include the extent of the economic impact this project has on the community, the development of partnerships, innovation, originality, whether the project or program can be duplicated as a “best practice,” and whether the project or program appears to be cost-effective.

The 2024 WEDA award for Economic Development Project of the Year – Business Recruitment was awarded to The Benaroya Company’s Voltage Park project, led by Lisa Goodman. Voltage Park is a next generation cloud provider for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Centeris Data Centers will be one of its primary facilities as it launches globally. With approximately 24,000 Nvidia H100 GPUs (*Graphics Processing Units – H110s are the most powerful GPU chip in the market*), Voltage Park’s cloud is one of the most powerful collections of cutting-edge machine learning computers in the world. Voltage Park’s mission is to make machine learning infrastructure accessible to all, from large enterprises and research universities to seed-stage startups and nonprofits.

The project has brought over \$100 million in private investment and over 200 well-paying construction jobs. “We are pleased Voltage Park found Centeris Data Center to be such an excellent fit for their multi-faceted requirements,” said The Benaroya Company Principal, Larry Benaroya, “We are delighted to welcome them and look forward to supporting them through their rapid, global expansion and delivery of new and exciting machine learning services.”

In 2007, Benaroya acquired a former microchip production facility in Puyallup and converted it into the Centeris Data Center. They recognized that while changes in the microchip industry made the site unfavorable for chip production, the campus still had robust infrastructure that would support the needs of the cloud computing industry.

Centeris had many good qualities, but it would take major investments in equipment to capitalize on them. Washington State already had a tax incentive to help technology companies equip facilities with the computing hardware needed to power the future. But the incentive was only available in rural counties. In 2022 the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1846 which expanded the incentive to urban counties. The bill was sponsored by Representatives April Berg (D-44) and Alex Ramel (D-40) and championed by Michael Transue who worked with stakeholders to get the bill passed. Michael worked tirelessly to garner the support of legislators, WEDA, Labor, and other key stakeholders to successfully expand the incentive to urban areas.

The passage of the state-wide data center tax incentive spurred immediate interest from leading global corporations who in the past chose to locate in Oregon, Arizona and other more competitive states. Reflecting on the impact of the legislation, Benaroya stated, “I want to congratulate and thank ESHB 1846’s prime sponsor, Rep. April Berg who recognized and promoted the positive economic development an urban data center tax preference policy could bring to our state.”

“We congratulate Centeris Data Center on being selected by Voltage Park as a primary location for its global launch,” said Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier, “We’re thrilled they have chosen Pierce County to construct and operate a future-focused next generation Cloud AI operation, demonstrating we’re an attractive home for cutting-edge companies providing jobs of the future. The Voltage Park project brings significant investments, including 200 high-paying construction job opportunities for our residents.”

Said Jonathan Smith, Executive Director of the Yakima County Development Association and WEDA Awards Committee Member, “Economic development is a team sport. Occasionally one player hits a home run, but more often a team effort brings a project home. The Voltage Park project truly exemplifies this.”

**2024 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RETENTION/EXPANSION
Washington Autonomous Vehicle Cluster (WAV-C) Illahee Waterway Tire Cleanup**

This award celebrates the successful creation or completion of a creative, economically significant, and/or model project in a community or region. The project could be one that has retained jobs, was particularly difficult to achieve, was extraordinarily competitive, had multiple partners or contributed to community well-being.

The Washington Autonomous Vehicle Cluster (WAV-C), a program at Kitsap Economic Development Alliance (KEDA) is leading the way in advancing the development and adoption of autonomous marine vehicles. By fostering collaboration among industry leaders, academic institutions, and government agencies, WAV-C creates an environment for pioneering technological advancements. WAV-C actively promotes industry growth by facilitating network building and providing essential resources to its members. WAV-C aspires to establish the Pacific Northwest as a global hub for autonomous technologies, setting a standard for international excellence. WAV-C aims to play a pivotal role in revolutionizing operations, enhancing safety, and promoting sustainable practices through the utilization of autonomous marine vehicles.

WAV-C collaborated with Serco, an international service organization with extensive experience in environmental remediation, and garnered support from additional partners, including the Suquamish Tribe and the Port of Illahee. This initiative, the first part of a three-phase series, focused on utilizing cutting-edge underwater unmanned technologies to accurately locate tire clusters dumped into Puget Sound since the 1970s. The goal was to create a detailed map for targeted removal in subsequent phases.

“Puget Sound, a crucial ecosystem, faces a silent menace with approximately 500,000 tires discarded decades ago, releasing hazardous toxins and jeopardizing aquatic life and public health,” remarked Seth Abelson, WAV-C Program Manager. “WAV-C recognized the urgency of this pressing issue, acknowledging its broader implications for the local economy and community welfare.”

Nestled within Puget Sound, a pivotal and dynamic resource, an unspoken threat persists: Tires discarded decades ago. Additionally, the presence of these tires disrupts recreational activities, casting a detrimental shadow over the local economy and community welfare. The tire reclamation initiative extends beyond the mere promotion of local economic growth. It boldly addresses the environmental challenge, holding the promise of restoring our waterways. Through this commitment, it not only safeguards the delicate ecosystem but also ensures the well-being of public health.

**2024 INNOVATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD
Manufacturing Recruitment Tool - Targeted Urban Area Tax Exemption**

This award recognizes that not all economic development projects are alike. In fact, there are frequently projects that happen or programs that are developed that do not include the “deal” that economic developers typically consider as a success. WEDA recognizes innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, novel and groundbreaking. WEDA recognizes that communities and individuals are doing state-of-the-art work to further the field of economic development. It may be the attraction of a world-class event that made a significant economic impact on a community, an atypical alliance of groups

who may have never worked together before or the creation of a program that significantly improves a community's ability to attract investment.

The Targeted Urban Area Tax Exemption program has seen success in implementation in the City of Richland with retaining two business expansions that were considering other states as well as two new very competitive recruitments. This program works because it exempts companies meeting the minimum requirements (creating 25 family living wage jobs, \$800,000 project valuation and 10,000 square feet of building) from property taxes on improvements (taxes are still paid on property) for up to ten years. These are dollars that the City would not have received if not for the project, and the project would not have sited there if not for the program. The program is made possible through 2021 legislation Chapter 84.25 RCW. It is important to note that while there is a cost to the city during the exemption period, there is exponential benefit in the long-term through jobs and economic impact to the region.

TRIDEC, the region's Associate Development Organization (ADO) nominated the program. Karl Dye, President & CEO of TRIDEC said, "This tool is a game-changer, making Richland more competitive with states like Texas, North Carolina, Oregon and Idaho and ultimately more successful in recruitment."

Michael Cade, Executive Director of the Thurston Economic Development Council and WEDA Awards Committee member remarked in presenting the award, "This program sets the course of efforts for many economic developers in the state. It has created a pathway forward for how economic and community developers can be innovative in supporting investment into their communities. WEDA is proud to be able to recognize this good work and to provide the story and example for others to emulate as appropriate for their communities. It builds investment into the state's economy."

This year, WEDA awarded two Innovation in Economic Development awards due to the excellent caliber of both nominations.

2024 INNOVATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD

Tacoma Blue Edge Network

This award recognizes that not all economic development projects are alike. In fact, there are frequently projects that happen or programs that are developed that do not include the "deal" that economic developers typically consider as a success. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, novel and groundbreaking. WEDA recognizes that communities and individuals are doing state-of-the-artwork to further the field of economic development. It may be the attraction of a world-class event that made a significant economic impact on a community, an atypical alliance of groups who may have never worked together before or the creation of a program that significantly improves a community's ability to attract investment.

An impressive partnership including the City of Tacoma, 5G Open Innovation Lab, Washington Maritime Blue and the Edge Cluster installed Phase 1 of the Tacoma Blue Edge Network in the Port of Tacoma. The network allows for leveraging state-of-the-art connectivity, edge computing and applications to increase efficiency, enhance worker safety and improve profitability for maritime enterprises. The network seeks to leverage Tacoma's long-standing maritime heritage with the technology of today and tomorrow. Phase 1 of the Network serves five maritime manufacturers and logistics providers.

“The Tacoma Tideflats project is a clear illustration of collaborative innovation applied to a real world business challenge. It is a model that can be readily scaled across many industries and applied to countless other use cases. We are thrilled to receive this important recognition from the Washington Economic Development Association. It is tremendously validating for all involved in bringing the Tacoma Tideflats Project to life,” said Jim Brisimitzis, Founder & Partner, 5G Open Innovation Lab.

“Collaboration and innovation are prominent characteristics of Tacoma, and this project is the latest example,” said Jeff Robinson, Director of Community and Economic Development for the City of Tacoma. “We are delighted to support our existing businesses through this state-of-the-art network and to welcome the entrepreneurs who will use the network to solve challenges and build the businesses of tomorrow.”

2024 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Lacey Food Truck Depot

This award recognizes economic development organizations/entities/individuals that have made strides in improving the diversity, equity and inclusion within their work, communities or organizations. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, groundbreaking and/or novel.

The City of Lacey (City) strives to remove barriers to help its local entrepreneurs flourish. In 2021 during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people who were not working started their own businesses. Some operated out of their homes and others – especially those with food-related businesses – operated out of a truck or trailer. Food trucks are often seen as a means of entrepreneurship that is accessible to a diverse range of individuals, including minorities, due to lower startup costs compared to traditional brick-and-mortar restaurants. To help these start-up businesses, many of which were minority-owned, the City of Lacey created a Food Truck Depot pilot program. To support entrepreneurs, the City provided space on a city-owned site for business owners to park their food truck/trailer and sell their creations. In the first year of the program, the City provided the site free of charge, to help reduce cost barriers.

By the third year of the project, the City successfully secured six “resident” food trucks – that included Hispanic-, Pilipino-, Jamaican-, Black-, and woman-owned businesses. Four of the six (67%) entrepreneurs were first-time business owners and all are disadvantaged business enterprises. The City of Lacey reduced multiple barriers to help these entrepreneurs successfully launch their businesses by providing a location, services, and assistance with understanding the requirements of operating a “mobile food unit” in Thurston County.

“We are humbled and very honored to receive the 2024 Economic Development Award for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion for this impactful project,” stated City of Lacey Economic Development Coordinator, Wesley Nguyen. “It’s a testament to the collective dedication of our City, community members, businesses, and leaders in championing diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are committed to creating a city where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.”

2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Small Business Innovation Fund – Clallam, Grays Harbor & Jefferson Counties

This award recognizes economic development organizations/entities/individuals that have made innovative efforts to support economic response and recovery, whether it is ongoing COVID-19 recovery, a flood, fire or other significant disaster or perhaps a significant public safety crisis. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, groundbreaking and/or novel.

In the 2022 legislative session, WEDA developed the concept then led the advocacy for a new, one-time \$34.5 million Small Business Innovation Fund (SBIF) using federal pandemic relief funds and the Washington State Department of Commerce implemented the program. Funding has supported more than 22 projects across Washington State focused on increasing programs and services to help meet the needs of underserved communities, businesses and entrepreneurs. Projects included small business incubators and accelerators, support for local procurement initiatives, improvements to physical workspaces in response to public health requirements or acts of vandalism, support for small business competitiveness programs focused on hiring and retention of workers, and projects that increase the ability of a small business to succeed and thrive. The Small Business Innovation Fund supported community-based programs and services that meet the needs of BIPOC entrepreneurs, women-owned small businesses, and businesses located in underserved, low-income and rural parts of the state.

One outstanding SBIF project on the Olympic Peninsula was led by the Associate Development Organizations (ADOs) of Clallam, Grays Harbor and Jefferson Counties. Funding was used to increase the capabilities of 273 small, underserved businesses in Clallam, Grays Harbor and Jefferson Counties so they become more efficient with their business practices, more aware of their opportunities, able to effectively market their goods and services to increase revenues, prepared to respond to business opportunities and able to increase their net operating income. Six partners conducted targeted outreach to the community businesses, and then conducted one-on one assessments to ascertain if the business could benefit from any of the three types of free professional bookkeeping, legal and marketing services that were offered by the program at no cost to the business. Additionally, the Clallam County Economic Development Council will connect small businesses to other resources, such as continued support through business resiliency programs.

“Empowering hundreds of undeserved businesses in our area was a collaborative community effort across the board. By partnering with local professional service providers and community colleges to train bookkeepers, we created lasting relationships and support for local businesses,” said Colleen McAleer, Executive Director of the Clallam Economic Development Council, who led this team effort. Said Bruce Kendall, WEDA Awards Committee Chair in presenting the award, “The WEDA Awards Committee recognized that this was an exceptional team effort. Instead of just giving out funds to small businesses, these economic development leaders created a program that was truly catalytic and allowed the businesses to become more competitive and resilient for the long-haul.”

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About the Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA)

As Washington State’s *only* trade association laser-focused on economic development, WEDA is committed to recovering, retaining, recruiting and expanding jobs and re-investment in Washington State. WEDA members include economic development organizations, cities, counties, ports, tribes, businesses, education/workforce and community-based organizations that prioritize economic development.