



CountyBIZ

A quarterly publication of the Economic Development Division

1st Quarter

2009

BUSINESS NEWS UPDATE

The Pierce County Planning and Land Services Department will close its development center on the following dates in response to budget cuts. Closure dates this year will be:

Tuesday, May 26th
Friday, Sep 4th

Friday, Jun 12th
Monday, Oct 12

Monday, Jul 6th
Wednesday, Nov 25th

Friday, Aug 7th
Thursday, Dec 24th

The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act has two provisions that can benefit businesses in Pierce County. First, tax cuts. These include:

- Reduced estimated tax payment requirements
- Deferral of income from cancellation of debt
- S-corporation built-in gains tax relief
- Net operating loss carry-back
- Work Opportunity Credit
- Depreciation breaks extended
- Advanced energy investment credit
- Renewable electricity production credit
- Alternative Fuels pump tax credit

Second, ARRA provides significant direct financial support to firms developing wind, solar, hydro, and other alternative fuels. Another sector receiving enhanced funding is healthcare technology. Firms providing technological solutions to reducing administrative costs and improving patient care can also benefit.

The World Trade Center Tacoma (WTCT) Welcomes Its New Director Anthony Hemstad. He was chosen by the WTCT Executive Committee after a comprehensive selection process that lasted several months. You can learn more about Mr. Hemstad at: <http://www.wtcta.org>

World Trade Center Tacoma Globe Awards Dinner and Auction is Thursday, May 21st at the Hotel Murano. Four local companies will be honored for their contribution to the economic vitality of Pierce County.

The Globe and Marco Polo Awards recognize the significant contribution that international companies make to our economy. In addition, the Port of Tacoma and the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce will each present an award to a notable company. Video cameos, produced by Pierce County News, will be aired during the ceremony and on the Pierce County News Channel.

Chambers Bay will host the U.S. Amateur in 2010! Volunteer or get involved! Visit www.2010usamateur.com

The Economic Development Division is pleased to recognize this year's winners.

2009 Globe Award

General Plastics Manufacturing pioneers in the formulation of high-performance cellular solid polyurethane and polyisocyanurate products. General Plastics has earned an outstanding reputation for developing unique foam-based technical solutions to difficult problems. The company offers many fine products and services to customers searching for a quality supplier of polyurethane-foam-related technology.

2009 Marco Polo Award

Tahoma Imports specializes in providing high quality products from around the world. The company seeks to offer wholesale pricing to the public. As a direct importer, it is able to provide items at significantly lower prices. A motto is, "Why pay full price when you can pay the boat price?" Being a smaller boutique business, Tahoma Imports is able to provide exceptional and personalized service to its customers.

Port of Tacoma - 2009 Community Vitality Award

The Transportation Club of Tacoma founded in 1926, the Club contributes to the improvement and advancement of the transportation and logistics networks in the Puget Sound area. The Club offers its members a great networking opportunity, while the membership provides the community with significant contributions to local charities. In addition, the Club consistently contributes a significant amount of scholarship funding to the family members of its membership.

Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce

2009 George Francis Train International Commemorative Recipient

Emerald Home Furnishings is a retailer of fine home furnishings and has showrooms in Tacoma and Las Vegas, NV. It also has sourcing offices in Haining City, China, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The current product lineup includes fabric and leather upholstery and motion furniture, casual and formal dining room furniture, bedroom suites as well as occasional and accent pieces. The company's focus and commitment is to its customers, quality, and its employees.

Made in Pierce County

The Economic Development Division strives to make Pierce County the right choice for business. We work to preserve and improve business operations in a variety of ways - from providing an array of technical assistance, to supporting beneficial business legislation. We are ready to help obtain permits, provide loan assistance and much more. Please contact any one of us if we can assist you; our contact information is listed at the end of this newsletter.

In each issue of our newsletter, we are proud to showcase a local company that has chosen Pierce County as its home. In this issue we feature a company that produces a very unique product.

Fresh Northwest Design is considered the premiere bottle decorating studio, with many of their bottles found in treasured private collections around the world. Fresh Northwest Design specializes in custom etched and hand-painted wine bottles designed by highly-skilled artisans utilizing techniques peerless in the industry.

Scott Schoenen bought Fresh Northwest Design in July, 2006, and is as upbeat about its future now as he was then. That's not to say the business is immune to the current economic downturn. It is not.

A native New Yorker, Scott has over ten years of business and technology experience at companies such as Lucent Technologies and Merrill Lynch. When he moved out from New York he looked at about five businesses in the area and chose Fresh Northwest Design because it is a niche industry with a good client base and a lot of room for growth.

Economic Development Division (EDD) staff had the chance to sit down with Scott and discuss his background, the company, the employees, and the prospects and dreams of Fresh Northwest Design.

EDD: *What were the major hurdles you faced when first taking over the company?*

Scott: Learning the business artistically and business wise; getting to know the clients. It's so true about hitting your stride by year three. You make a lot of mistakes the first few years, but they are invaluable mistakes nevertheless.

"We look to truly partner with our clients. Whenever possible we promote our client's wines, donate to charity, and help promote the companies with which we do business."

EDD: *How do you select your employees? Do you look for artistic talent first, and then work habits, or the other way around?*

Scott: Depending on the position of course, but we do have a lead artist, a UPS graduate in Fine Art. Our Designer is a graduate of the Art Institute of Seattle, and I have my MBA from New York University. For production, we generally look for a strong artistic bent - the patience, focus, attention to detail required working in the arts on a daily basis. Of course, it's also important that the individual is a good cultural fit, as all of our employees are friends inside and outside the office.

EDD: *How has business been in the first quarter of 2009 compared to 2008?*

Scott: We are down from 2008. In general, we look to truly "partner" with our clients. Wherever possible we do all we can to promote our client's wines, donate to charity, help promote corporations, etc. We believe in community and doing all we can to support it. Our business is one not easily advertised and we rely on our clients telling their colleagues about us. But we are extremely fortunate. We work on amazing events, for example, the Kentucky Derby for three years now. We just did a series of bottles for "The Joint," the new music club at the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas that opened this year. We have done bottles for celebrities, athletes, and musicians, typically signed and resold for charitable fundraising.

Beautiful Art is Business at this Gig Harbor Company



An example of a “series” project

EDD: *What strategies are you pursuing to combat the downturn in the economy?*

Scott: Increasing our customer service every chance we get. You can never be too good at that! We are trying very hard to retain our charitable giving; we are cutting internal costs as much as we can by delaying purchases, refinancing our business loans to take advantage of lower rates, increasing our presence at trade shows, and increasing communication via email newsletters, etc. However, we absolutely WILL NOT sacrifice quality. If our workload drops, we cut back on our employees' hours. But we have yet to lay off any employees, nor have we sacrificed their health insurance.

EDD: *In the next year, what changes in your business do you anticipate?*

Scott: If certain large contracts come to fruition in the upcoming months, we anticipate hiring two or more employees. I like to be conservative with respect to hiring, so that we take people and then keep them on. We have not lost an employee; all have 3 - 10 years with the company. We may entertain moving to another location, particularly if we grow in employees and revenue. Over time, we may see our business evolve beyond etching and hand painting. For now, there is tremendous untapped potential in a truly unique, hand-made product that brings a smile to our clients' faces. There is something to be said for sticking to what you do and do it better than anyone else. Our reputation supports this view. This is a position we are fortunate to occupy, thanks to an extremely talented group of employees.

EDD: *Are there any concerns or issues that have hampered your ability to operate your business in Pierce County?*

Scott: In general, Pierce County has been a friendly place to work. I think there is a network in Pierce County and it's extremely hard to break into that network if you didn't grow up here. In some ways, I think it's hard for business leaders to accept we are a serious business who happen to work in the arts. Conversely, I find it's equally hard for the arts community to accept us as artisans. It's ironic. Finally, it would be ideal if there was more opportunity for our business in Pierce County. Today, less than 5% of our revenue comes from our home base, despite the fact that we've been here for 20 years. We do more business in Florida than Pierce County!

To see a gallery of photos of these well crafted and beautiful products or to contact Scott Schoenen, go to:
<http://www.freshnwdesign.com/index.php>

**Pierce County
Office of the County Executive
Economic Development Division
950 Pacific Avenue, Suite 720
Tacoma, WA 98335
253.798.6150
www.piercecountywa.org/edd**

Denise Dyer, Manager ddyer@co.pierce.wa.us
Kathy Sorgenfrei, Administrative Assistant ksorgen@co.pierce.wa.us
Rob Allen, Economic Development Specialist rallen3@co.pierce.wa.us
Sheree Clark, Loan Officer sclark1@co.pierce.wa.us
Kevin Clegg, Economic Development Specialist kclegg@co.pierce.wa.us
Joe Phillips, Special Assistant for Business Services jphilli@co.pierce.wa.us
Hans Kueck, Economic Development Specialist hkueck@co.pierce.wa.us

**The mission of the Economic Development Division
is to support a business environment
that provides the foundation of a jobs-based economy in Pierce County.**

