

**North Kitsap Herald**  
**Building a network into the future**

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Sep 17 2008

KITSAP COUNTY — The Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council is taking a state-given charge to the next level, calling on area businesses — especially those in Kitsap — to reap the benefits of a technological opportunity.

Currently starting is what's been termed the Telework Pilot Project recruitment phase, during which 75 businesses will be sought to implement a six-month, government-sponsored telecommuting program.

Orientation begins this month.

KRCC and Poulsbo City Council member Ed Stern has heralded the local telework wave; he said in Kitsap, with 25-40 percent of its 123,800 workers currently commuting to King, Pierce and Snohomish counties daily, testing out systems for virtual employment makes plenty of sense.

"It's a perfect lab rat for the metro corridor," he said.

Companies, from those of a large corporate nature to those with only a handful of employees, are now being invited to a one-time-only chance: take part in a teleworking experiment that could, Stern said, lead the state and possibly the entire nation.

#### The Project

The aim of the Telework Pilot Project is to implement, revise and eventually submit a telework toolkit to the Washington State Legislature, one that can be duplicated and infused into workplaces throughout the state. Using \$150,000 in funding from the state Department of Transportation Commute Trip Reduction program, KRCC will present the template July 1, 2009. Between then and now the organization needs businesses and employees willing to accept or perform work done from home on an agreed upon number of days per month from October to April.

"This is a real opportunity for select companies to be at the cutting edge, certainly in the state of Washington and maybe even beyond," Stern said. The toolkit is meant to operate "so not every organization, every individual, needs to reinvent the wheel."

He said telework itself boasts a varied past as "handmaiden to whatever crisis du jour is going on," serving in the late 1990s as a job recruitment method, then acting

as a response to gas prices in the early 21st century; it's currently viewed as a "green" alternative.

"In no way is it being properly seen as its own answer, as part of a puzzle to be sure, and so we (KRCC) decried that," Stern explained.

Held captive by geography or modes of physical transportation, Kitsap employees can instead use Web-enabled procedures, allowing them freedoms that should be especially handy during the May-June 2009 Hood Canal Bridge closure.

A business can become involved from an employer-led movement, or an employee-led approach. There is no cost, and Stern said a fair amount of "hand-holding" will be provided.

Kitsap Regional Libraries director of information technology and facilities Susan Whitford said the nine-branch county-wide system has put teleworking in place for some of its IT staff on a once-weekly basis.

"It allows people to access systems remotely so we can provide 24/7 coverage for technology," said Whitford, also a telework toolkit committee member.

While a virtual commute fits well with some employees and job descriptions, others are less inclined.

"It does not work for all positions nor does it work for all people. I think that's a very important piece to consider," she said. "Some people do better when they've got other people around and can work in a synergist environment."

Still, according to a 2004 American Interactive Consumer Survey conducted by The Dieringer Research Group, the number of employed Americans who performed any kind of work from home, with a frequency range from as little as one day a year to full-time, grew from 41.3 million in 2003 to 44.4 million in 2004, a 7.5 percent growth rate. More findings from the survey can be found at [telcoa.org](http://telcoa.org), Web site for the Telework Coalition, which promotes telecommuting.

### The Benefits

Stern said the major change component brought on through telework is a behavioral one, in which managers need to throw off the outdated presumption that work is achieved through the physical movement of goods and products.

Telework can, he said, "do more faster and at lesser cost than any other single transport out there."

"What we're talking about is breaking the addiction," Stern said. "You have to move from managing by the clock to managing by the product or deliverable."

A 10 percent reduction in peak load travel — achieved through a one-in-10 work day telecommute — will free up gridlock on ferries, roads and bridges.

There are also plenty of overhead pennies to be saved by companies, including in the real estate and infrastructure categories, to help increase their bottom line.

“We want to help you become more profitable. Show me a business that’s not interested in that,” he said.

Whitford added employee quality of life, morale and satisfaction increases through the flexibility of telework, leading to a lower workplace turnover.

That holds true for Boeing programmer analyst Anita Westrum-Grumer, 57, a Poulsbo resident who fulfills her duties virtually each day. An employee of 23 years, it was when she moved across the Sound six years ago that she decided commuting wasn’t her best option.

“Once I moved over to Poulsbo (she used to live just 10 miles from her Bellevue campus) I thought ‘Well, this is the pits,’” Westrum-Grumer said. “I started by crossing the Sound twice a week, and I went to once a week, then once every other week. Now I am virtual, which means I work from home all the time.”

Trading out her office space, land line and desktop for a company-provided home set-up meant she could rid herself of a \$29 round trip commute that began with catching a 6:20 a.m. ferry and would deposit her back in Kitsap as late as 7:15 p.m.

“If I had to schlep across the Sound and do a four-hour commute every day I would have retired, because that really takes a chunk out of your life,” she said. “When you only have to meander into the next room and log in, it’s not as bad.”

Now Westrum-Grumer and her coworkers hold most of their meetings through conference calls and online systems.

Of the three employees in her metrics group, two work virtually full-time and the third telecommutes part-time. She said 73 of Boeing’s 343 help desk analysts work from home.

“It really is just a perfect thing for our type of job, because really we do the same work, whether we’re there or somewhere else,” she said.

Now Westrum-Grumer eats lunch at home each day with her life partner, enjoys her home’s view of the water, wears slippers if she so feels and is at the table for dinner at a normal time. She takes fewer days off to accomplish small tasks thanks to a flexible schedule, which allows her to work from home later into the evening or during the weekends.

Her virtual employment behooves Boeing as well: according to a CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey detailed by [telcoa.org](http://telcoa.org), the average per-employee cost in 2005 alone rose to \$660 per employee, costing some large employers over \$1 million per year.

Long-term, Stern said he envisions a federally provided telecommuting system, provided much in the same way Interstate 5, the Central Railroad and the Eerie Canal once were, to reverse offshoring and potentially change the shape of education.

“This is the single biggest contribution Kitsap County can make to the global warming effort,” he said. “It’s an exciting future if we can get there.”

To learn more, visit [www.kitsapregionalcouncil.org/telework.html](http://www.kitsapregionalcouncil.org/telework.html) or call (360) 297-4300.

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