

Saturday event trying to launch a fresh vision

We all know we have challenges ahead. Who has solutions? How are we, the people of Whatcom County, going to adapt to our volatile, changing, high speed world?

The way my friends and I figure it, we need a big-hearted vision and ideas big enough to quantum leap past all our differences! A vision that's fun and worth dreaming about!

To start the conversation rolling, the Whatcom County Re-Entry Coalition (WhatcomREC.org), UnitingCreatives.com, YES!Magazine.org and others are sponsoring the Community Opportunities Visionary Conference at Bellingham High School on Saturday, Oct. 1, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. I will be moderating as the president of the coalition and founder of UnitingCreatives.com, a new social media company providing technical support services and follow-through.

We invite your voice and constructive ideas in interactive sessions.

GUEST OPINION



Joy Gilfilen

The coalition already held four public forums to gather insights. As a businesswoman and mom busy with my own challenges for the past few years, I've tried to avoid talking about the part of our community that is struggling. Not anymore. I've seen my middle-class friends losing jobs, homes, families. I've seen many of our prime teenagers falling off the first rungs of the ladder to success, unable to get a grip. I've seen Facebook and social media transplant our old civic sys-

tems. It's not business as usual anywhere.

Our team has asked over 20 professionals to look around and pay attention to what is falling apart in their field, then to report what is growing, budding and showing up as future trends. You will hear from employment specialists, a judge, a pediatrician, musicians, counselors, business owners, artists.

In the past five years, these speakers have experienced the seismic shifts in our economic, social and ecological worlds. They know how our families, businesses, institutions, organizations and communities are reeling. They see how parents and decision makers from all disciplines are feeling the stress as cutbacks compound and pressures continue to increase.

In 2002 Richard was a multi-millionaire publisher in denial that change could happen to him. He became emotionally paralyzed, lost it all, ended up homeless for two years, then wrote "Breakfast at Sally's," a New

York Times bestseller. Robert, a criminology professor, discusses public policy, privatization of prisons and how media and social media impact college students. Jim is a local varsity coach turned housing specialist who is helping some of his ex-students reenter society from prison.

Check out the complete list of speakers at WhatcomREC.org.

At 7 p.m. Saturday night, celebrate with the Community Vitality Concert - Y? Why Not? This multicultural performance opens with a Native American blessing and features international recording stars Dana Lyons and Shawn Gallaway along with

The Productionists is our own local hip/hop, jazz and R&B band. Rumba Northwest dances to the Afro-Cuban beat. Matt Audette and the Circle of Friends Band share country. Dana is our local hero in the conservation and ecology world as he has worked with people like Jane Goodall, and produced an array

of albums. From Nashville, Shawn has shared the stage with the many literary and musical figures. His music video I Choose Love has over half million hits on YouTube.

Proceeds from Saturday's events go into the coalition's projects to help support those reentering society from incarceration, their families and others at risk in Whatcom County. The long-term vision of the coalition includes building a self-sustainable job reskilling, cooperative housing and recovery center to support vitality in our community.

For more information and tickets, go to WhatcomREC.org. The suggested donation for the conference is \$75 and for the concert, \$20. If you don't have funds, bring an idea and attend anyway!

Joy Gilfilen is president of the Whatcom County Re-Entry Coalition and founder of UnitingCreatives.com. She can be reached at Joy@UnitingCreatives.com or at 739-7493.