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SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

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Workforce Southwest Washington Announces Clark County Recipients of Excellence in Workforce Development Awards

Vancouver, Wash. (Dec. 13, 2018) – Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) presented its Excellence in Workforce Development Awards to two Clark County organizations at its board meeting on Wednesday, December 12.

Awards were given in two categories: Innovation in Workforce Development and Excellence in Building Workforce Partnerships.

- The **Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce (GVCC)** received the Innovation in Workforce Development Award for its stemCONNECT program that introduces students in grades 6-12 to high-demand career pathways.

As Southwest Washington's largest business organization with approximately 1,100 member businesses, GVCC believes business needs to be actively involved in addressing the shortage of skilled workers, especially at STEM-related employers. With that in mind, GVCC, partnered with the Southwest Washington STEM Network, DIY Marketing Center and nConnect, with support from Banfield Pet Hospital and SEH America, to launch stemCONNECT, a program designed to help high school students discover high-demand career pathways in Clark County.

Through structured onsite visits to local businesses, including Webfor (a digital marketing technology company), the Port of Vancouver USA, and HAPO Community Credit Union, the program strives to spark students' personal interest and connect them to businesses and industries that are thriving and in need of a skilled future workforce.

To address employers' needs for soft skills and to teach the students how to present themselves appropriately and with confidence, stemCONNECT provides students with a networking skills training conducted by Veronika Noize of DIY Marketing Center prior to their workplace visits.

stemCONNECT is already making an impact. Teachers report that 22 of the 34 students that took part in the first visit to Webfor enrolled in Fort Vancouver High School's CTE web design course this past fall.

"Local employers are a critical piece of our regional educational partnerships, ensuring our young adults are ready to work in high-demand fields across our community," said Workforce Southwest Washington CEO Kevin Perkey. "The Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce's stemCONNECT program creates opportunities for students to explore first-hand how they can apply their education to the workplace and why STEM courses are critical to their long-term success."

Serving businesses, job seekers and youth in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties.



- **Interject Data Systems** received the Excellence in Building Workforce Partnerships Award for its work with various organizations to help individuals in our community learn about, embrace and use technology.

CEO Jeff Honsowetz and his team work closely with Washington State University Vancouver to mentor and apprentice college students, helping them develop real-world professional experience while completing their last two years of study. They have six college students currently in their program and it continues to grow. Apprentices work in groups to learn data skills, teamwork, agile collaboration, and resourcefulness. Interject encourages their whole team to donate time and skills to meet needs within the community.

Jeff introduced a kids coding club six years ago to provide free instruction and help children gain confidence to create with technology instead of just using technology in their phones and tablets. The clubs prepare kids for success in any field by teaching them logic, problem solving, critical thinking, and soft skills like public speaking and teamwork through a focus on code literacy. This summer, WorkSource hosted an eight-week session of the coding club.

Chris Hight, a Data Engineer with Interject, shares Jeff's passion for code literacy. Chris is starting a nonprofit called Future of Code, whose clubs and classes are now occurring in multiple locations throughout Vancouver, including tech companies, community partners, schools, and libraries. Students from 6 to 18 years old are encouraged to join. Future of Code offers leadership opportunities for high school and college students, as well as community professionals. Parents are also encouraged to participate and learn with their children.

The Interject team demonstrates leadership in building partnerships by collaborating with diverse groups. They frequently host and support meetups in the community. Interject has participated twice in the Vancouver Tech Tour alongside other local tech companies. Honsowetz says, "The tech community in Vancouver is coming together, and we are seeing so much talent and leadership shaping our future. Vancouver is a great place for growing companies thanks to Partners in Careers, WorkSource, and community leaders."

"We can accomplish much more together than individually," said Workforce Southwest Washington CEO Kevin Perkey. "Jeff and his team at Interject create programs that help improve the skills of individuals and contribute to the growth and sustainability of our community."

Special **Power of Partnership Awards** were presented to WSW's Columbia-Willamette Workforce Collaborative partners Clackamas Workforce Partnership and Worksystems.

Nominations of businesses in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties are due January 11, 2019. To download the Awards Guidelines and Nomination Form, click <https://bit.ly/2zrnwyW>.



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Innovation in Workforce Development Award: Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce
(l to r) Teresa Lawwill, GVCC Community Partnerships Director; Bill Skidmore, WSW Chair of the Board



Excellence in Building Workforce Partnerships Award: Interject Data Systems
(l to r) Bill Erickson; Jonathon Carothers; Robby Boney; Chris Hight; Jeff Honsowetz, Interject CEO; Derek Olson; Bill Skidmore, WSW Chair of the Board



Power of Partnership
(l to r) Bridget Dazey, Executive Director, Clackamas Workforce Partnership; Andrew McGough, CEO Worksystems; Bill Skidmore, WSW Chair of the Board; Kevin Perkey, CEO Workforce Southwest Washington.

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