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## WASHINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (WEDA)

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Contact Information for Award Winners and Photos Available Upon Request*

### **Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA) Celebrates Excellence in Economic Development & Legislative Economic Development Champion with 2023 WEDA Economic Development Awards**

Washington – The leaders of Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA), Washington State’s only trade association laser-focused on economic development, awarded their 2023 Economic Development Awards on March 30 at their 2023 Spring Conference in Olympia, 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 Alisha Benson, who also serves as CEO of Greater Spokane Inc. “There are leaders across our entire state working tirelessly to recover and grow jobs and strengthen economic vitality in their communities. These awards honor leaders and projects that are excelling in this important work.”

WEDA was particularly honored to recognize Washington State Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck as WEDA’s 2023 Legislative Economic Development Champion of the Year at a special WEDA Legislative Reception at the Governor’s Mansion which also included Governor Jay Inslee.

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. We were also pleased to once again present awards in two newer, relevant and important award categories established in 2021, the Economic Development Award for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and the Economic Development Award for Response & Recovery.”

WEDA Board Chair, Alisha Benson, CEO of Greater Spokane, Inc. added as she presented the 2023 Legislative Economic Development Champion Award at a special WEDA Legislative Reception, “WEDA does not honor elected officials every year. The WEDA Awards Committee determined that this particular year, it was time to shine light on our state’s tremendous Lieutenant Governor’s commitment to our shared goals to recover and grow jobs and increase shared prosperity across our state,” Benson added, “Lieutenant Governor Heck has

made extraordinary and tireless efforts throughout his career on behalf of our State, including work to grow jobs, increase our trade and export opportunities and address competitiveness challenges such as education and the lack of affordable housing. We also want to particularly acknowledge his tremendous leadership and work on the 2022 Business Competitiveness Analysis about which he met with us several times then presented last Summer at our WEDA Conference in Bellingham. We all know that this work is not easy, and Lieutenant Governor Heck is a leader who is bright, straightforward, authentic, pragmatic, bipartisan and he leads with common sense and kindness. Lieutenant Governor Heck is a true Champion for Economic Development.”

2023 WEDA award winners recognized for outstanding achievement in Economic Development also include:

### **2023 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Lindsey Harris**

*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.*

Lindsey Harris graduated as one of just 42 students in her class in Toutle Lake, a small Southwest Washington town in the shadows of Mt. St. Helens, population 700. And now, she is leading economic development and real estate on nearly \$150 million dollars in infrastructure projects and contracts for the Port of Longview, one of Washington’s largest deep-draft ports. As the Port’s Assistant Manager of Economic Development and Real Estate, Lindsey works on both the \$100 million Industrial Rail Corridor Expansion and the \$20 million International Way Grade Separation Project, which will facilitate multi-modal cargo movement through the region. Combined, these projects will accommodate current regional industries experiencing significant growth and attract new development opportunities to Cowlitz County – perhaps even new green energy alternatives, which she is actively pursuing on behalf of the Port.

Lindsey is the Past President of both the Lower Columbia Transportation Association and the Northwest Marine Terminals Association, actively engaged with chambers of commerce and regional governments, and participates in the High-Wide-Heavy Coalition, a multi-state coalition.

Said nominator Christian Clay, Director of Business Development for the Port of Longview, “In a time when young professionals rarely return home after college and constantly struggle to balance personal and professional life, Lindsey believes that both can exist equally in Cowlitz County – and she is devoting her career to ensuring that balance exists in the community by attracting jobs, true wage increases, and diversity. Her deeply rooted commitment to community prosperity is what makes her an outstanding emerging leader in economic development.”

### **2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATES OF THE YEAR**

#### **Tamsin Bell and Wesley Nguyen, Co-Chairs of the WEDA’s Emerging Leaders Group.**

*This award recognizes a person or group of people who made a significant and/or innovative contribution to an economic development project or program during the past year. 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.*

Said Jon Smith, Executive Director of the Yakima County Development Association and WEDA Awards Committee member, “This year, the WEDA Awards Committee wanted to honor two amazing leaders who have helped develop a new, outstanding and forward-thinking program for WEDA and our membership, the

new WEDA Emerging Leaders Group. The WEDA Emerging Leaders Group aims to provide leadership opportunities, focus on professional development, learn and share best practices, foster hands-on experience for new economic development professionals and welcome those new to economic development. One of the Group's core beliefs is that diversity in thought and experience is appreciated and valued. WEDA considers the Emerging Leaders Group to be an important part of its strategies to foster Diversity, Equity & Inclusion,"

Smith furthered, "Tamsin Bell and Wesley Nguyen organize monthly meetings of the Emerging Leaders Group, social events at WEDA conferences and they organized an excellent speaking program at the last Summer Conference. They have established a strong new mentoring program which is now on its second cohort, and they are helping craft a new initiative for WEDA focused on creation of a stronger workforce pathway for economic development, including better understanding why we each chose this profession and how we can all help attract the next generation of economic developers for Washington State. The members of the Emerging Leaders Group all deserve credit for their active engagement and commitment to their professional development and to the future of our profession."

## **2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RECRUITMENT**

### **Port of Pasco - Darigold Recruitment, Reimann Industrial Center Project**

*This award celebrates the successful creation or completion of a creative, economically significant, and/or model 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.*

Darigold broke ground on September 8, 2022, at the Port of Pasco's Reimann Industrial Center. The Pacific Northwest's premier dairy processor is making a \$650 million private investment to construct the largest milk processing facility North America. The facility will make a premium protein powder and butter, using state-of-the-art technologies and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The groundbreaking ceremony marked two years of work by the Port of Pasco to win the site selection process.

Darigold's private investment and construction of a 350,000-square-foot processing facility will result in a major increase in local property tax revenues to support schools and community. Conservative estimates predict the project will have a property valuation in excess of \$200 million. Darigold will hire 220 employees with an average hourly wage of \$26.50 plus a competitive benefit package. Darigold will use a third-party cold storage facility, attached to its plant. This will nearly double the overall project. New Cold will construct a 400,000-square-foot freezer facility that uses zero oxygen cold storage technology. The New Cold project will make a \$200 million private investment and create 150 to 200 high wage jobs.

The Port and its partners have collaborated on this project since the beginning, coming together to develop a plan to reconstruct and construct major utilities. The City of Pasco, Franklin County, Franklin PUD, Cascade Natural Gas and TRIDEC have all worked together to prepare for this massive project. The Port is investing approximately \$25 million in public infrastructure. To do so, the Port of Pasco is the first public agency in the state to utilize the new Tax Increment Financing tool (a tool for which WEDA advocated), having established a TIF Area for the Darigold project in December 2021. With the TIF area the Port will bond for up to \$10 million. The project also has significant intergovernmental partnerships – the Washington State Legislature committed \$7.5 million, Franklin County's .09 Economic Development Fund has provided \$2.3 million, CERB provided a loan grant for \$575,000, and a Federal Congressionally Directed Spending appropriation committed \$3.6 million for the Last Mile Rail Project.

“We are thrilled to welcome Darigold to Pasco and the Reimann as the anchor tenant in the Port’s latest industrial park. It’s incredibly rare to attract a project of this size and scope,” said Randy Hayden, the Port of Pasco’s Executive Director at the project groundbreaking , “Darigold’s state-of-the-art facility will use the latest technology, serve as a model of sustainability, and create a new market for our region’s ag producers.”

### **2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RETENTION/EXPANSION Cowlitz Economic Development Council and NORPAC - NORPAC Expansion Project**

*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.*

NORPAC worked with the Cowlitz Economic Development Council, Washington Economic Development Finance Authority, Workforce Southwest Washington and the Washington State Department of Commerce to facilitate the expansion at the plant creating 100 new jobs and a \$50 million capital investment. US Senator Maria Cantwell recognized the project for its innovation, saying “I think it’s a lesson for the entire nation. You’re a community in transition. But NORPAC answered the call. They created a new market, they created a new opportunity, and they created a lot of jobs here and saved a lot of jobs here in Cowlitz County.”

This project is also a win for the environment as NORPAC will now have the capacity to recycle 800,000 metric tons of waste paper to create new packaging.

“We are honored that WEDA has recognized our work to continue investing in our community to not only support new jobs but also continue our mission to prevent tons of waste from going into landfills,” shared NORPAC CEO Craig Anneberg. “We also want to thank the Cowlitz Economic Development Council for being a strong partner in these efforts and for nominating us for this award.”

### **2023 INNOVATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD City of Spokane Valley Data Collection Tool for Homelessness and Clean Up Sites**

*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.*

In the City of Spokane Valley, Housing and Homeless coordination is housed within the Economic Development Department. When the City created a homeless outreach team to engage people experiencing homelessness in 2022, Mike Basinger and Eric Robison quickly realized the need for a data collection tool that would allow the Department to better understand the type of individuals that were unhoused within the city; barriers they were facing; and locations (property, neighborhoods) that they frequented. This information would help the city develop strategies to transition individuals out of homelessness and address health and safety concerns in the community. In addition, the city was beginning to prepare its Housing Action Plan and needed to understand the community's housing needs more fully as a measure of economic development. Seeking a coordinated and informed approach, Eric and Mike, with the help of GIS Analyst Matt Reeves, developed a mobile app/GIS-based survey tool that the city's homeless outreach team and other individuals

could use to collect and record information as they interacted with homeless individuals. The city applied an interactive process to define what data needed collecting and identified solutions to ensure the data was accessible in various formats to employees and other individuals, which included city staff, nonprofit outreach workers, and members of the city's police department.

One lesson learned through the development of the data tool prompted creation of a second tool -- an additional mobile app/GIS-based tool to pinpoint, route, and track follow-up actions necessary regarding "cleanup" of abandoned camps, discarded vehicles, trash, or graffiti. These two tools work hand-in-hand in collecting and recording information, and help the city make informed decisions regarding how to allocate resources, prioritize strategies, and follow-up with issues that need to be addressed on a day-to-day basis.

Said the City in its application, "These tools are improving our understanding and approach to addressing homelessness. Without data it is just speculation. These tools help us move from speculation to informed decision-making."

### **2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION Community Business Connector Program – Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce**

*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 Community Business Connector (CBC) is the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce's (Chamber) way to meet businesses owners where they are, and centers diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. As King County's Associate Development Organization (ADO), the Chamber is committed to helping small and BIPOC-owned businesses get effective support and technical assistance. The Chamber does its work sub-regionally and creatively to respond to the unique challenges facing neighborhood-based businesses. CBC is an example of that approach in action. The program is designed to help businesses facing challenges due to linguistic, cultural, and geographic barriers, including economic impacts of COVID-19, by making it easy for businesses to ask for help via a ticketing system, and matching businesses to organizations – the Connectors – rooted in local communities who understand what small businesses need. Business owners can find help in their neighborhoods from a Connector. They can feel secure knowing that someone will work closely with them to find assistance right away. Not only are Connectors a liaison between businesses and service providers, but they also keep business owners informed in ways they understand. Connectors are equipped to respond to businesses and help with:

- Access to capital, business planning, or marketing.
- Assistance with government forms or grants.
- Ease of understanding of resources with an interpreter.
- Meeting up in a rural or unincorporated area.

Currently, the Chamber contracts with seven Connectors serving 26 cities in King County, with a growing interest from other cities to add more service areas. The Port of Seattle, King County and several cities have already committed funding to the program during the two-year pilot, which began in January 2023. Together, the Chamber and its partners believe that deploying trusted messengers in their communities can help to address the barriers preventing BIPOC-owned and rural businesses from accessing available resources. They are excited to advance CBC's program objective: helping small businesses recover from the pandemic and thrive.

"We are thrilled to receive the 2023 Economic Development Award for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion for our new Community Business Connector program, and I want to thank WEDA on behalf of the Chamber team and

our funding partners, King County and the Port of Seattle,” said Rachel Smith, President and CEO of the Seattle Metro Chamber. “The program seeks to reduce geographic, cultural and language barriers for small businesses by connecting them with local liaisons who are rooted their communities and understand the network of business resources available. It is a tremendous honor to be recognized for outstanding achievement in economic development and we can’t wait to see more results to come from this program.”

**2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY  
Main Street Business Resiliency Response – Washington Main Street Organizations**

*This award recognizes economic development organizations/entities/individuals that have made innovative efforts to address the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. WEDA recognizes innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, groundbreaking and/or novel.*

Said Luke Hallowell, Economic Vitality Specialist for the Washington Main Street program in its nomination, “The Washington State Main Street Program is proud to submit this nomination because we had a front row seat to every Main Street Community’s incredibly strong show of support and ingenuity during the pandemic. These small but mighty nonprofit organizations worked tirelessly alongside their small businesses to understand complex programs, advocate for support, find creative modifications to traditional business practices, and help local residents find ways to contribute. The local Main Street directors in these communities were lifelines to their small businesses, because the trusting relationships were already in place before the pandemic broke out. We learned from these local organizations that resiliency isn’t just about the response in the wake of a crisis, but about the strong baseline of community connections that Main Street works to build every day.”

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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.