

WOMEN

In Business

PRESENTING SPONSOR:



Pita Montero

Seaside City Councilor



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR LINE OF WORK AND WHAT GOT *you* STARTED?

"Having worked in a variety of settings, I would say that my "line of work" has been PEOPLE and the path has always been interesting. I moved to Seaside in 2002, by that time, I had about 30 years in Healthcare Administration. I ran many departments in business offices in hospitals and clinical systems. For the last 12 years of that time, I ran a military health plan called the Uniformed Services Family Health Plan, which is available only in seven places in the country and is connected to the to the military through the TRICARE system. Being the administrator for that program. I ran a healthcare plan for military beneficiaries who are retirees and their family members as well as the family members of active duty. We had about 25,000 enrollees. I ran everything from enrollment to membership to claims, contracting with health care providers. I negotiated contracts with the Department of Defense for the plan itself and also lobbied for the plan in Congress because it had to be funded.

I got to the point where I was burnt out so engineered a layoff. I decided to spend a little R and R in Seaside because this was the place my siblings and I had been spending time together for some years for our 'Montero Adult Retreats'. My brother had already purchased a 2nd home as well as the old Cornet building. I was about halfway here and suddenly the thought it hit me: 'you know, you've been saying you want to live in Seaside; well now's the chance. If not now, will it ever happen?' I lived in Mukilteo Washington, in my dream house, a condo with a 180 degree view of Puget Sound; I had lived there only 14 months. And I thought I just couldn't give that up. But you know, I really believe that things happen for a reason and things happen the way they're supposed to happen. I just said to myself, "Okay, we'll see what happens" By the time I left Seaside two weeks later, I had money down on a house and money down on a commercial lot. My brother asked me to help project manage the refurbishment of the Cornet building which is on 130 South Holladay. So, I went back to Mukilteo and put the condo on the market; two days later it sold and 3 days later the homeowners' association filed suit against the builder. What timing! Between April and July of that year. I commuted from Mukilteo three days a week, which was a four hour drive each way. But I had to work on the building and on refurbishing the house I bought."

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR LINE OF WORK AND WHAT GOT *you* STARTED?

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"Opening a fabric store was not an intended part of my move. But in talking to our real estate agent I said something about my sister-in-law and I thinking that, at some point, we would love to have a fabric store. Suddenly an article appeared on the front on the front page of The Daily Astorian "Fabric store coming to Seaside" I thought "OMG, Robin's going to kill me"! We ended up deciding to crash course learn the fabric retail business. Montero Sister's Fabrics and Creative Inspiration opened August 2002 - only 4 months later! We really loved everything about having the store - especially the customers. I wouldn't change it for the world. But, when you own a business, you don't own it; it owns you. In 2007 we came to the conclusion that we wanted our lives back. Even now, 15 years later, we still meet people who remember their wonderful experiences in our store. Robin and I are so proud of that.

In the middle of the great storm of December 2007 I began representing Tongue Point Job Corps Center as its Business & Community Liaison. I'm most proud of improving the perception and acceptance of Job Corps and Job Corps students throughout Clatsop County. Eight years later I became the Executive Director of the Seaside Downtown Development Association. Having been on its board during my retail years, it was a good fit. I credit Laurie Mespelt for a well-run organization. Having semi-retired, I joined the US Census Bureau to work on the American Community Survey. I didn't need a job but it sounded interesting and I could pretty much set my own part time hours. I truly learned our geography - from Clatskanie to Pacific City, and especially the interior of Clatsop county.

I finally officially retired in 2019. But I don't consider myself fully retired. I have a deep commitment to giving back to my community through volunteerism. The major way is contributing as a Seaside City Councilor since 2010. As a local retailer I served as Chamber President. In addition I've worked on the boards of CASA, Clatsop Behavioral Health, Clatsop Economic Development Resources, and Seaside Museum. I currently serve on the board of the League of Oregon Cities and as President of the Women's Caucus of the League. I also serve on the Coaster Theatre board, the Senior Advisory Council for Northwest Seniors and Disability Services, the Clatsop Review Board (which provides oversight on foster care cases), Sunset Empire Transit District advisory council and budget committee, and the Clatsop County budget committee. Line of work? It's all about PEOPLE."

WHAT IS A CHALLENGE *you* HAVE HAD TO OVERCOME?

“Probably the biggest challenge I've had to overcome is that I come off like a steamroller. And I'm very enthusiastic. I am not shy about my opinions or asking the tough questions. Over time, I have worked on adapting my approach.”

AS WOMEN WE OFTEN DON'T BRAG ABOUT OURSELVES. TELL ME SOMETHING YOU'VE DONE THAT *you* ARE PROUD OF.

"Something that I am proud of, is something that doesn't get talked about a lot. For awhile I even felt I had to defend myself as it was so controversial in our city. And it's actually what led me down the political path. . In 2004 the city council was looking to accept a plan from ODOT that would have widened 101 through Seaside from the current 2/3 lanes to 5 lanes; add four more stop lights; destroy 17 businesses and 67 homes and have some major environmental impact. Residents had lots of questions; citizens in Seaside wanted more information. After a council meeting lasting into the wee hours, it became evident that the citizens needed to have a voice in making this major change. After that meeting, Al Wexler, a businessman and major landowner hired a lawyer. I was approached to be one of the petitioners to sue the City to have the issue decided by the voters. I knew that taking a stand in such controversy could hurt my business. It was also my sister-in-law's business. But, I felt strongly enough about this that I became a petitioner. The Clatsop County judge decided in favor of the voters making the decision. And I became one of the leaders of the group, "Friends of Seaside", formed to inform and educate the voters. And I was very visible - from debating the mayor on the radio to being a debater at a town hall meeting. In May 2005, 56.11% of the voters decided against the proposal to widen the highway through Seaside to 5 lanes. Despite many people thanking me for taking a stand, I became persona non grata with the men on the city council.

Today I look back with 20/20 vision. Now in a housing crisis, what would it be like if we had 67 fewer houses? What would Seaside be like with 17 fewer businesses? And, of course, we are now getting the center lane that's always been needed through several blocks on 101. The other thing I reflect upon is that Gearhart is planning to reduce its four lanes down to three. Yes, I am proud that I was able to make a difference in our town."

**WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WISH YOU
COULD TEACH ALL YOUNG women?**

**“How to develop and sustain
a good self-worth; how to
reach out when they need
support; and how to provide
support to other women.”**

WHO INSPIRES YOU AND WHAT DRIVES *you?*

“My big inspiration for what I've been doing in my elected life has been **Betsy Johnson**. I've told Betsy that she is my hero. When I first saw Betsy in action, I didn't like her. I was asked by Clatsop Community College to testify before the Ways and Means Committee, to increase funding for community colleges. During the hearing it didn't appear she was paying much attention to the speakers. She spoke when we were done and it was apparent she had heard every word even as she was multi tasking. This woman really knows her stuff; she has such command of the language; she doesn't mince words. As I started learning more about what's going on in our state learn more about Betsy, I've only just increased in my respect for her. I marvel at her and I wish I had a lot of her qualities. I would definitely say that she's been an inspiration for me.

I believe that each of us has a motivation to make a difference. Some people have the opportunities to act on that motivation. Some people never do. It's different strength for different people. For me, it's sort of blossomed. I choose to make a difference in many different paths. Sharing my skills and efforts is a way to say thank you to the universe for what I have.”

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LUM'S
AUTO CENTER

"Advice for women? Go for it. Do your thing. Don't hold back" - Lori Lum

"Be strong, yet willing to take chances" - Julie Lum