Business connections

JULY 2025

Centralia - Chehalis

Chamber of Commerce

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Inside This Edition: Chehalis, Centralia, and County Parks Drive Community & Commerce

Chehalis Parks: Growing Community, Business, and Tourism

By Cynthia Mudge

Chamber Executive Director

Chehalis, Washington, has long been known for its small-town charm and deep sense of community—but in recent years, its vibrant parks and recreation program has taken center stage as a regional attraction, boosting both tourism and business.

With five parks, a bustling aquatic center, a modernized sports complex, rentable shelters, and facilities, and even RV accommodations, the City of Chehalis has transformed its outdoor spaces into economic and social powerhouses. These investments are about more than green lawns and playgrounds—they're helping shape the future of the city.

Parks with Purpose

Chehalis Parks and Recreation offers year-round programming that serves thousands of residents and visitors. From youth sports clinics, sensory camps, and swim lessons to women's self-defense classes and summer theatre, the department delivers options for nearly every interest. In the warmer months, families can enjoy Music in the Park—free Friday evening concerts beginning July 18—and Movie in the Park night in August.

Penny Playground, nestled within Recreation Park, is a shining example of recent upgrades. Renovated in 2021, the beloved play space received



Chehalis Athletic Fields now host 24 tournament weekends a year

colorful new structures and a refreshed design that has been embraced by families from across the region. Nearby, improvements to the athletic fields and the Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatic Center have created state-of-the-art facilities that serve both local and out-of-town users.

"These renovations were a labor of love," said Lilly Wall, Chehalis Parks and Recreation Director. "They wouldn't have been possible without generous grants, business sponsorships, and strong community support."

Future Focus: Stan Hedwall Park

The city is now turning its attention to Stan Hedwall Park, a 200-acre natural destination that features walking trails, access to the Newaukum River, 29 RV rental sites,

sports fields, and recently updated restrooms and showers.

A community visioning effort—Reimagining Hedwall Park—is currently underway. Residents invited to participate in shaping the park's future by taking a public survey (see sidebar for link). Additional insights will be shared at the Chehalis Chamber's July Forum on Thursday, July 10, at the V.R. Lee Community Center, where Wall and recreation coordinator Sarah Prok will speak about upcoming plans.

An Economic Powerhouse

Beyond recreation, the parks program has become a major economic driver. Since expanding the fields at Recreation Park in 2021, the city has increased its capacity from just five to 24 annual



Penny Park is one of the crown jewels of the Chehalis park system

tournaments, attracting 20 teams per event.

"It's brought in over 60,000 visitors a year," said Wall. "That has a huge impact on our local economy—from restaurants to hotels to retail."

The Gail and Carolyn Shaw Aquatic Center contributes another 35,00 visits annually, with roughly 60% of users coming from outside the area, further demonstrating the program's regional pull. The center also serves 700 to 900 children locally through swim lessons.

Businesses are taking notice, too. Many now sponsor teams and programs, helping fund field improvements and equipment. These partnerships support a cycle of investment that benefits everyone—from local youth to business owners.

Powered by Community

The parks department runs lean but effective, with five maintenance staff responsible for all city parks and municipal buildings. Additional support comes from the Chehalis Foundation, generous donors, and a strong volunteer base.

"We have 273 acres to maintain, and there's always something to do," Wall shared. Volunteers contribute by weeding, painting, repairing bleachers, restoring trails, and more. Those looking to give back can reach out at 360-748-0271 or Recreation@ ci.chehalis.wa.us.

A Bright Future

As Chehalis continues to invest in recreation, its returns are evident: healthier youth, stronger community ties, increased tourism, and growing local business.

"We're passionate about offering healthy options for kids that build friendships, skills, and character," said Wall. "That's what drives us every day."

With public support and civic vision, Chehalis Parks and Recreation is building not just parks—but a legacy.

Parks: Our Evergreen Treasure

and economy. Whether it's

a family picnic at Mayfield

Lake, a morning hike through

By Rep. Peter Abbarno

20th Legislative District

As your State Representative, I've seen firsthand how our public

parks—both state and local are more than just green

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spaces. They are cherished community centers, vital to our health, well-being,

Seminary Hill, or a weekend bike ride on the Willapa Hills Trail, our parks are the heartbeat of Southwest Peter Abbarno Washington.



real, measurable benefits: reducing stress, encouraging physical activity, generating tourism dollars, and strengthening community bonds. In rural areas like Lewis County—where access to healthcare and recreation can

be limited—parks become even more essential. They're places for healing, gathering, and connecting generations around shared outdoor experiences.

Challenges to Access Unfortunately, this past legislative session was a mixed bag for Washington's outdoor enthusiasts. While our bipartisan capital budget made strong investments in parks, other decisions made recreation more expensive for working families. The majority party raised the cost of Discovery Passes, increased hunting and fishing license fees, and implemented new fuel-related taxes—even as Washingtonians already pay among the highest gas prices in the country. These decisions hit families and rural communities hardest, making

it more difficult to enjoy the Evergreen State.

Delivering for Local Parks Despite these challenges, our bipartisan capital budget team came together around shared values. As Assistant Ranking Member on the House Capital Budget Committee, I was honored to help negotiate investments that directly benefit parks and public lands in our communities.

Over the past five years, I've worked hard to bring home significant wins for local parks in Lewis County:

- \$50,000 Chehalis Recreation Park improvements
- \$52,000 Seminary Hill Natural & Heritage Trail in Centralia
- \$206,000 SW Washington Fair and Equestrian Center
- \$259,000 Mayme Shaddock Park in Napavine

\$283,000 - Werden Park in

- Vader \$875,000 – Proposed Tennis
- and Wrestling Facility in Chehalis • \$1.092 million – Borst Park
- Ball Field Lights in Centralia • \$2.03 million - Willapa Hills
- Trail Bridge Project near Adna
- \$2.48 million Centralia Quad Infield Turf Project

Please See ABBARNO, Page 3





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Centralia Parks: Connecting the Future

Chamber Executive Director Centralia, Washington, is a city defined by its balance between natural beauty and community spirit. With parks tucked into neighborhoods, lining the rivers, and woven through its historic landmarks, Centralia offers a diverse range of recreational opportunities that reflect both its past and its

By Cynthia Mudge

vision for the future. From the sprawling 120-acre Fort Borst Park—home to scenic trails, water access, historic Borst structures, ballfields, and picnic kitchens—to the quaint, brick-lined Central Park alleyway nestled downtown, Centralia's park system is as varied as it is vibrant. Whether residents are skateboarding at the Fuller's Twin City Skate Park – located inside Rotary Riverside Park – or hiking through Seminary Hill and other wooded greenbelts, the city offers something for every outdoor enthusiast.

But as the city looks ahead, planning for population growth is key. Centralia is projected to grow by 31% over the next 20 years, a shift that presents both opportunities and challenges. Maintaining the city's smalltown feel while expanding services and amenities requires strategic investment—and in 2024, the Centralia City Council took a major step in that direction.

The launch of the Hub City Greenways Initiative signals a bold vision to enhance connectivity, livability, and access to nature. The longterm goal: create 35 miles of connected trails and walkways that link neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces. Currently, the city boasts eight miles of established trails, but this new initiative aims to transform that network into an interconnected system of both urban and nature-based trails.

Ten neighborhood "hubs" have been proposed as part of the plan, each serving as an access point to the broader greenway system. In total, Centralia has 414 acres of parks and open spaces and more than 1,900 acres of shoreline—an impressive natural asset base that will become more accessible thanks to the project.

"The Hub City Greenways is more than a parks initiative," said Kyle Markstrom, Parks & Buildings Operations



Central Park is a popular pocket park owned by the city. Photo by Jacob Larson



Photo courtesy of The Chronicle

Borst Lake is a popular family area inside Fort Borst Park.

Manager, who is helping lead the effort. "It's about creating a walkable, connected, and healthy city—one that invites residents outdoors and attracts investment in neighborhoods and local businesses."

The initiative also promotes civic engagement. Residents and business owners are encouraged to take part through public meetings, volunteer work parties, and other communityled events. "We will have many opportunities in the future for community input on the trails as well as volunteer opportunities," Markstrom added.

With its ambitious greenways plan, Centralia isn't just preparing for future growth—it's shaping a city



Photo by Jacob Larson

Fort Borst Park offers 120 acres of trails and outdoor activities.

where outdoor spaces serve as vital threads connecting people, places, and possibilities. For more information

about the Hub City Greenways Initiative, visit: www. cityofcentralia.com/565/Hub-City_Greenways.

Lewis county parks: where history, nature, and community meet

By Cynthia Mudge

Chamber Executive Director

Lewis County is more than a scenic stop between the mountains and the coast—it's a destination rich in parks, historic sites, and year-round recreation that supports both residents and visitors.

Managed by Lewis County Parks and Recreation, the system includes ten public parks and historic landmarks. At its heart is the Southwest Washington Fairgrounds, established in 1909. With over 100,000 square feet of multiuse buildings, grandstands, stages, and barns, the fairgrounds host events yearround, culminating in the popular Southwest Washington Fair each August. These events boost the local economy by supporting restaurants, lodging, and small businesses.

From Packwood to Toledo, Lewis County's outdoor spaces invite adventure and relaxation. The Cowlitz River Park offers peaceful trails and river access, while Mineral Lake Swim Area, Rose County



Photo courtesy of The Chronicle

Park, and Schaefer County Park provide family-friendly amenities like picnic shelters and play areas. In Toledo, the South County Regional Park serves as a green hub, and Hopkins Hill and the Mt. St. Helens Viewpoint offer stunning, undeveloped landscapes.

History is also preserved in Lewis County's parks, including two of the state's oldest churches—Claquato Church and St. Urban Church—which stand as proud reminders of the region's roots.

More than scenic retreats, these parks are community builders—hosting reunions,

concerts, and youth sports while attracting tourism and supporting the local economy.

For a full list of parks and activities, visit DiscoverLewisCounty.com. From fairs to forest hikes, Lewis County's parks offer something for everyone—right in your own backyard.

BIZZBUZZ S



WHAT'S THE BUZZ?



Three Summer Evening Events on the Chehalis Centralia Railroad

Fundraiser for Historic Passenger Car Renovation Summer Bash BBQ & Drain Ride - July 12, 4:00pm - 9:00pm Roaring '20s Dinner Train -July 19, 4:00pm - 9:00pm '70s Theme Dinner & Dinner & Train Ride - August 9, 4:00pm - 9:00pm Begin the evening at 4:00 pm with social mingling and the full bar while the group

gathers for departure at 5:00 p.m. Following the two-hour train ride through the Chehalis River Valley, you will arrive back at

the event under a large tent at 6:30 p.m. Bring your blankets and lawn chairs and set up your cozy spot for the evening.

For just \$99 per person, you can support the Chehalis Centralia Historic PassengerRenovation Project while you get to have the adventure of a scenic train ride throughone of the most beautiful areas, a delicious dinner, and an evening of fun andrelaxation. For more details and to book your tickets, visit our website: https:// steamtrainride.com/



Firecracker Deals at the **Centralia Outlets!**

Summer is here! Which means the start of school is not too far off. Avoid the rush of back-to-school shopping and score discounts directly from name brands right now. Shopping at the outlets means getting your name-brand merchandise for less every day of the week. Shop for outdoor apparel and gear

at Eddie Bauer Outlet and the Columbia Clearance Store. Explore deep discounts at Polo Ralph Lauren Clearance, where already discounted items in-store are an additional 40% off. Don't forget the significant savings you can also score on athletic gear and more at Nike Clearance Store, New Balance Factory Store, Skechers, Famous Footwear Outlet, and Hanes Brands Outlet. If you're looking for summer

swimwear, consider The Children's Place before the season ends. Ladies, if you are ready to update your workwear, visit Chico's and

wardrobe staples you need and the seasonal trends you want. Accessorize those new outfits with items from Kay Jewelers Outlet and Coach Outlet.

Lane Bryant Outlet to find the

To view a complete list of stores and store sales, please visit our website at www.centraliaoutlets.com or follow us on social media to get inside peeks at what's new in the stores.



Chehalis West Assisted Living Has Some Rooms Available!

Chehalis West Assisted Living has cleared the wait list, and we have one medium sized studio, as well as one, 1-bedroom apartment available

for immediate move in. These rooms will not last long! Rooms include weekly housekeeping, daily laundry, full service restaurant style dining, daily activities, community trips, monthly live music concerts, access to the nurse-aide call station 24-hours a day, and more. We

would love to introduce you to our community!

Please contact Nikki Storms at 360-219-7709 to set up a tour.

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Is your electrical panel struggling to keep up with your energy needs? It might be time for an upgrade! At Exodus Electric, LLC, we specialize in installing and upgrading electrical panels to ensure your home runs smoothly and safely. **Why Upgrade Your

Electrical Panel?** - **Enhanced Safety**: Outdated panels can pose safety risks. A new panel reduces the risk of electrical fires and overloads.

- **Increased Power Capacity**: Modern homes require more power. An upgraded panel can support new appliances and technology. - **Improved Efficiency**:

A new electrical panel ensures better energy flow, which can save you money on utility bills. Don't wait until it's too late!

Contact Exodus Electric, LLC today for a free estimate on your electrical panel upgrade. Call us at 360-623-7177 or visit our website at www. exoduselectric.net to schedule your consultation. Let us help you power your home

safely and efficiently! Joke: "I finally managed to get rid of that nasty electrical charge I've been carrying. I'm ex-static!"

Small Business Source (Timberland Regional Library)

This resource provides exclusive full text for top small business

reference books, along with tools covering various business topics. It includes business videos, advice, and resources on creating business plans. Key features include statespecific resources, business basics, start-up kits, and industry-specific information for small businesses. The platform offers a user-friendly interface, making it easy to access essential resources for entrepreneurs. Timberland Regional Library (TRL) supports local businesses with a variety of free services, including \$44 monthly printing and copy credits, free faxing, Wi-Fi, internet access, and meeting spaces. We also offer resources on entrepreneurship, management, law, and more. Visit TRL.org/small-business to

Master Hydrangeas with Master Gardeners!

learn more.

Join the WSU Extension Lewis County Master Gardeners on July 19 at 10 AM at the Providence Place Demo Garden in Chehalis for a hands-on, informative class on growing and caring for hydrangeas. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting out, this workshop will provide expert guidance on keeping your hydrangeas healthy and vibrant year after year. Hydrangeas are beloved for their stunning blooms and versatility, but they require specific care to thrive. In this class, you'll learn: The best planting techniques to ensure strong growth. Pruning methods for shaping your hydrangeas and maximizing flower production. How soil pH affects flower color and how to adjust it naturally. Watering & maintenance tips to keep your hydrangeas flourishing. This session will give you the knowledge and confidence to make your hydrangeas shine! Call 360-740-1212 or email julie.pirtle@lewiscountywa.gov (Monday-Thursday, 9 AM-3 PM) to

pre-register and secure your spot. Come expand your gardening skills and enjoy a morning of learning, connection, and garden inspiration



Beat the Back-to-School Rush at Rainier Eye We know that things get hectic

in August with gathering school supplies, sports physicals, and new clothes, so this is your friendly reminder to schedule back-to-school eye exams for your kiddos. (Also, this is a reminder for the teachers and school administrators who will soon be very busy!) Make sure your students can see to learn without eye strain, headaches, or missing things on the board. Often, kids won't complain about their vision because it's the only way they have seen the world. Don't wait for a school

measure what size print can be read at a distance. Our eye exams will check the clarity of vision, measure a glasses prescription, how the eyes work together as a team, and the health inside and out. Dr. Ferris and our team enjoy seeing patients of all ages and can help you

schedule at 360-506-5544 or

vision screening- School screenings

and pediatrician checkups merely



RAINIER EYE

ABBARNO: From Page 1

These projects preserve natural beauty, support youth sports, improve public safety, and generate economic activity through tourism and recreation. Capital budget investments aren't top-down mandates from Olympia—they originate from our local leaders and organizations who know what our communities need most.

Grants and Opportunities

There are many opportunities available to support local park and recreation projects. Communities should explore grant programs like:

- No Child Left Inside • Park Improvement Projects
- Recreation Projects
- Outdoor Learning Grants More information is available through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office at rco.wa.gov or by contacting my office directly at

RepresentativePeterAbbarno. com.

Protecting What We Love

Looking ahead, I remain committed to protecting and expanding access to our parks. That means supporting maintenance and infrastructure, increasing rural outreach for grants, and continuing to fight for bipartisan solutions. Every investment made in our parks pays dividends for our health, economy, and environment.

The parks we enjoy today are gifts from generations before us. Let's ensure we preserve them, improve them, and pass them on—thriving and accessible—for the generations yet to come.

Rep. Peter Abbarno represents the 20th Legislative District in the Washington State House of Representatives and is the House Republican Caucus Chair.



Photo provided

Parks are an important part of family and community health.

Thank You for the Support of Our Sponsors!







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Business After Hours took place at Althaueser Rayan Abbarno, LLP, on June 19, where participants mingled with their staff, enjoyed appetizers from O'Blarney's at Gibson House, and enjoyed a beautiful late spring afternoon.



The Chamber welcomed another new business with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Oak Bagels & Coffee on 13th Street.



Chehalis Farmers Market opened its 20th season on June 3 with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony to kick off the opening bell.



Joy Rails is a new attraction that celebrated its official summer opening June 10.

These are four passenger rail cars offering electric and

pedal options.



Oak Bagels & Coffee



FORE! It's Tee Time!

Register now for the 2nd annual Chamber Golf Tournament!
Our Flag sponsorships are full but we still have some teams and hole sponsors available and welcome creative ideas!
We are bringing back the Bottle Bash, Golfball Cannon,
Chamber Bucks, and auction. But most important:
It's a great day of golf and great company!
To register or find out more email director@chamberway.com or call Cynthia at 360-748-8885.

UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS!

July Forum

Thursday, July 10

8 - 9 am

V.R. Lee Community Center

13th Street & Williams (Chehalis)

Learn about the exciting future of Stan Hedwall Park and how you can participate in re-imagining this cherished facility. Lilly Wall and Sarah Prok.

Coffee & Bagels!

Business After Hours

Thursday, July 17

5 – 7 pm

Visiting Nurses Golf Tournament

Riverside Golf Club

1451 NW Airport Road, Chehalis

STP

Saturday & Sunday July 12 & 13

Penny Park Playground

13th & SW Williams Ave., Chehalis Saturday Bikers Food Stop

Sunday Bikers Luggage only &

cleanup

Volunteers needed! Contact

director@chamberway.com

MicroBytes Learning Center

Tuesday, July 22 8:30 - 9:30 am

Chamber Conference Room

500 NW Chamber of Commerce Way

Limited seating. RSVP at director@ chamberway.com

Two sessions are offered by Community Mediation Center:

Delivering Bad News

De-Escalation Tactics
That Really Work!

Chamber Golf Tournament

Friday, July 25

Riverside Golf Club

1451 NW Airport Road, Chehalis

Ribbon Cuttings

Quick Quack Car Wash

Wednesday, July 9

11 am

624 NW Arkansas Way, Chehalis

A Curtis Hill

Tuesday, July 15 Noon

733 Cousins Road, Chehalis

Lewis County Autism Coalition

Saturday, July 19

3:30 pm

375 Linhart, Napavine

4th Dimension Costruction

Tuesday, July 29 Noon

404 Tower, Centralia



Schedule a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony!

The Chamber offers
Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies
as a free service to members
and non-members. It is our
way of acknowledging the
hard work and investment of
time and money to opening,
expanding, moving, or
re-branding a business.

To learn more or secure a date call 360-748-8885 or email director@chamberway.com