

A great recipe for economic success



By the Tri-City Herald Editorial Board

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We live in an area blessed with a robust economy. That can make us complacent, taking for granted the good things happening around us.

So we wanted to make sure two great projects by our local ports did not go unnoticed.

Ports help feed our economy in new and interesting ways — driving land development, as well as incubating start-ups.

We are celebrating projects in different stages of progression, one finished and with tenants and the other just getting started.

In Kennewick, an estimated 500 people turned out on a sunny, yet brisk Friday afternoon for the ribbon cutting of the Columbia Gardens Urban Wine & Artisan Village.

If you don't follow the ribbon-cutting circuit, a turnout of 500 is astounding. It might have helped that most folks assumed the opening of two tasting rooms would include free wine, but it also shows the interest in this major development along Columbia Drive in Kennewick.

It's in an area that's long been discussed for redevelopment — bridge-to-bridge, river-to-railroad, pick a name over the years — and now a project has actually come to fruition thanks to the Port of Kennewick and the city.

While it was not without its hiccups — a first-round of construction bids that came in over budget, poor weather that slowed construction and issues with the water pretreatment system necessary for wineries to use the facilities for production — the project is now a showpiece for Kennewick.

And the nearly \$5 million investment by the two partners was just the first phase. Up next will be a plaza for food trucks and eventually a culinary center operated by Columbia Basin College.

Other improvements already made by the port to Clover Island, surrounding trails and area around Duffy's Pond further add to the new-found appeal of the area.

We're excited to see the new life Bartholomew Winery and Monarcha Winery bring to Kennewick, and an often overlooked destination.

On the opposite side of the county, the Port of Benton is helping a long-time tenant with a major expansion.

Chukar Cherries will double the size of its production facility with the help of the port, its landlord in Prosser. The \$1.8 million expansion will give Chukar Cherries the room it needs to keep up with consistent annual sales growth.

The port secured part of the money for the project through a grant and will use its line of credit to finance the rest. Chukar Cherries will lease the building from the port.

Chukar Cherries has about 50 full-time employees, and that number grows to more than 140 during the busy holiday months when sales surge, making it a significant employer in the Prosser area.

The 30-year-old family-owned business will occupy 12,000-square-feet of new space, expected to be finished by August.

Both the Prosser and Kennewick projects show the power of locally-owned businesses and the role production agriculture plays in our region.

So grab a glass of wine and a chocolate-covered cherry and celebrate the willingness of our ports to invest in these kind of businesses and developments.