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He was preoccupied. All immediate thought had been hijacked. Tension held him at gunpoint. The adrenaline was
surging. Concentration was primary. Control was critical. It was just a matter of
time. Now all he could do was wait.
She was ready. She had been waiting for this day. She was polished, defined, stunning.
In the heat of the moment, it occurred to her that things would never be the same again. She could be
hurt, damaged or possibly deformed. But she couldn’t think of that now. She knew tonight was her night,
and she would have to perform her best.
As the mango sun ripened, the anxious fever heightened. He approached her. She remained still.
He gawked at her beauty. She felt the attraction. Confident, consistent and courageous, she could ask for nothing
more. He came closer, teasing her. She wanted him, but felt his apprehension. There was nothing he could do,
he couldn’t resist. He slid inside. When it felt right, he wrapped the straps around his body and yanked hard. He
was ready now. His heart beat faster, and when he thought it would almost burst . . . someone screamed:
‘DRIVER’S, PLEASE START YOUR ENGINES!!!!’
At Deming Speedway, racing starts at 7:30 p.m. The national anthem, for both U.S. and Canada, having been
sung, leaves a sense of patriotism lingering in the air. The stands are filled with an attentive audience, stocked with
souvenirs, snacks and beer, eager for the evening’s events. Down in the pits, the flurry of action signals the show is
about to start. The cars make their way onto the track for a few practice runs. As they line up, the tension grows,
driving slowly, waiting for the green flag to drop. As they approach turn three, the green flag flashes, and suddenly
a wave of adrenaline swells over the crowd. Bullets of mud shoot from beneath the tires, hailing over the crowd.
The cars battle for the winning position, waiting for a hole, so they might attempt a strategic pass. The yellow flag
drops, indicating some trouble, and all the cars slow their speed. Racing continues and seven laps later, the white flag
cues the last lap. As drivers aim for first place, the checkered flag is released and the rush is over.
The public has been captivated by racing since the days of Roman chariots stampeding through ancient stadiums.
According to ESPN, auto racing trails only football as the most watched spectator sport in the United States.
Sprint car racing at Deming, however, is a far cry from the professionalism of NASCAR, Indy Car, or Formula
One.
Racing sprint cars is all about speed. However it’s not quite as simple as putting the pedal to the
metal and letting her fly. Each car is built with optimum racing potential and maximum driver security in
mind. The top wing, made of light aluminum, is positioned atop the chassis. The adjustable wing is
angled to create downforce, so as the car speeds around the track at 75-85 mph it is pushed into the
ground, reducing the chance of flipping. The smaller front wing serves the same purpose.
Positioned on the front end, the wing tames the G-forces created by acceleration. The right rear tire,
slightly larger than the other three, also aids in preventing the car from flipping. The oval track
means that the car is constantly turning left, so the enlarged right rear tire creates ‘stagger,’
making the car sit at an angle for greater momentum.
The aluminum seat is molded precisely to the driver’s body size. Like a small cage on
an amusement park ride, the slim chassis allows for minimal mobilization. The priority
is stability because the more space for your body to move inside the car, the less
control you have and a greater chance of injury. It is imperative for the driver to
clinch down very tight because all the cars travel at approximately 75 mph, in
close formation, and accidents are likely to occur. But that’s part of the thrill.
There are several levels of sprint cars, but only three race at Deming:
the mini sprints, 250’s and 250 Juniors. The latter two have the same
250cc motors – identical to dirtbike engines. The only difference
is the age of the drivers. Juniors can be as young as 13 years
of age. The minisprints are significantly larger with 1100
cc’s, carrying approximately 150 horsepower, which is
similar to a racing motorcycle.
The 410’s are the next step up (referring to cubic inches now) and then the
410’s, carrying approximately 600
horsepower, equivalent to a
monster truck motor.
mud, guts and glory

story by kerensa wight

photography by ryan hooser
Obviously,
the more cubic
inches, the faster the
car and the greater the
element of danger.

Heat races determine who will run
in the main event, and the positions in the line up.
The first three places from each heat race qualify for the A-
main event, 25 laps. Everyone else qualifies for the B-main event. The
top three from the B-main go to the A-main, meaning approximately 12 cars
compete for the money positions. These rules apply exclusively to Deming, but the con­
cept is relatively the same at other tracks.

Race car driving, in the past, has been typically represented as aggressive, antagonistic and charged with a
megadose of testosterone. However, sprint car racing at Deming blows that conception out of the water. All drivers, pit crew
and personnel are genuinely concerned about each other and willing to help with advice, tools, parts or just moral support.

"We all want to race with each other. We all want everyone to race the best they can. It's funner that way. Nobody wants anyone to get hurt, so we all
try to help each other out. Of course, we all have our secrets and we all want to win. But we save the competition for out on the track," Deming driver
Chris Albrecht said.

And, although testosterone still dominates the track in this sport, the estrogen counterparts do not go unnoticed. At 17 years old, Annette
Blenkarn, #33, has dedicated the past eight years of her life to racing. Annette has been awarded both the of Rookie, and Roll-Over of
the Year for 1997.

Sharing a track with the big boys could be a challenge, but Blenkarn says she doesn't feel intimidated.
"We all get along really well," she said.

As friendly as the atmosphere may be, the racing at Deming is always serious. As the suspense heightens
for the A-main event, drivers put away the warm smiles and put on their game faces. The green flag
drops and unleashes the wild beasts. They rage around the track at an unforgiving speed, fully
aware that one little nudge could cause a pile-up. As they charge up the back straight,
approaching lap eight, Albrecht's #12 finds a hole which could put him in
fourth position. The car fades into turn three, staying close to the
inside, and projects out of turn four with rocket
velocity, passing #31.
Danny Bullock.

Bullock trails inches behind Albrecht as they reach maximum acceleration along the front straight. Albrecht drifts high, setting up for the next turn and securing his position.

Bullock, unwilling to give up his spot, makes slight contact, sending the #12 car catapulting through the air. The car flips five feet above the ground, landing on its still-spinning right front tire, which sends the car snapping back into the air, crushing the top wing and thrashing components and the driver.

The red flag ceases all activity. A deadened hush sweeps over the crowd. Pit crew, flagmen and medics rush the scene. Out of the silence climbs a dazed survivor—the crowd howls with relief.

"That was a wild ride," Albrecht said, wandering to the pits. "It's like being on the Zipper, only at ten times the speed. I could see cars passing under me, and I just shut my eyes and clenched my body, waiting for it to stop."

This, of course, is the biggest risk about racing—the crash. Injuries have occurred at Deming, but no deaths. In the event of a crash, the drivers are warned to keep their bodies as stiff as possible and to always shut their eyes, because it's been known for eyeballs to pop out on impact.

"The most common injury is in the back," said Dave Holmwood, who builds sprint chassis' as a business. "The impact can really crunch your spine and do some damage. And the forearms are pretty common too, because they can get tangled up in a crash."

The car, depending upon the seriousness of the crash, usually is out of commission for the rest of the race. However, the crew comes prepared with tools and extra parts, just in case she needs a quick fix. However, supporting this habit requires a tremendous amount of financial support.

And in the end it was over. The ceremony had ended abruptly. She had done her best to please him, but sensed his disappointment. He was ashamed, sorry for what he had done. He never meant to hurt her. They slowly carried her back home and let her rest. She needed him now, more than ever. He vowed to take better care of her. He would spend more time with her and give her the attention she needed. He never wanted that to happen again. He loved her too much. And she could not function without him. They could not live without each other; the passion was too great. But for now, they both needed some time apart. They left each other, knowing they would be back together the very next weekend to do it all over again.
is a Alcoholic/Drug Addict; type of problem detected: Alcohol...

story by Jennifer Dorsey
photography by Tim Klein
He hunches over the black-and-white tubular drawing table, eyeing a penciled line while Dave Matthews wonders about a "Typical Situation" in the background. His brow rumples as he squints with obvious displeasure. He picks up the pink eraser from the dresser on his right. With a few short, barely visible flicks of his wrist, the eraser smooths the line's edge until the drawing meets with his approval.

He places the green 6H pencil back in the first compartment of the worn, tan tackle box that serves as an artist's tool chest. He folds the three-tiered shelves, snaps down the top and pushes the chest back against the wall.

He's finished drawing for the night. It's Saturday. He'd like to go out, but he knows better. So, it's TV time.

He scans the dressers on both sides of the desk. They are topped with things of varying importance—a framed letter from his mother, a keepsake shot glass, a picture of his brother and sister playfully smashing him between them.

He casually glances at the walls above. The shelves are neatly lined with art supplies.

The thumbtacked collage of seven, formal-looking papers catches his eye, and his body slumps slightly with an inaudible sigh.

The light-blue sheet stands out from the rest. It reads, "Whatcom County District Court Probation Appointment: Gordon, Gregory Thomas".

"Not tonight," he tells himself. "I don't want to think about it tonight."

But he does. A judge sentenced Greg to think about it almost every night. He'll spend two years and $3,800 paying for his mistake.

It was just five short months ago that he and a friend shared a half rack and went out to have fun. Several pool games and beers later, they made their way to an all-night restaurant for breakfast and coffee. Although it was late, he felt fine. So he headed home.

At 3:40 a.m. December 10, 1997, in front of Cascade Pizza on Lakeway
Drive, the flashing lights of a police car signaled Greg to steer his car to the side of the road. The turn off to his house was less than the length of a football field from where his car stopped. It would have been an easy three-minute walk to his front door.

The officer informed Greg that his car had a broken taillight. He then asked Greg if he had been drinking. Still believing he was sober enough to drive, Greg admitted that he'd had a few. Once outside the car, Greg sang his ABCs. He closed his eyes, tipped his head back and lifted his foot in front of him. Yes, it did make him a bit wobbly, but it would make him wobbly almost anytime, he convinced himself.

"Everything's fine, it'll be fine," the voice in his head assured him.

Then came the Breathalyzer.

Greg blew 0.18 percent, well above the legal blood-alcohol level of 0.1 percent. The officer read Greg his rights, cuffed his hands and prodded him into the police car. All the way to the station, the little voice reassured him that everything would be all right.

His punishment began immediately that night when officers punched his license. Though still valid for driving purposes for 60 days, a punched license isn’t acceptable identification to cash a check, much less buy tobacco or alcohol.

"I was guilty before I ever went to court, but I didn’t think it would be too bad," Greg says. "I figured it would be mostly fines and a ticket and it would go on my record."

He figured wrong. The little voice of reassurance had no clue.

Similar to many others who are found guilty of drunk driving, Greg seriously underestimated the penalty.

At 22 years old, he is now a state-certified alcoholic, sentenced to pay for and attend treatment three hours a day, five days a week for five weeks. He also must go to 208 Alcoholics Anonymous meetings during his two years of probation, subject himself to random monthly urinalyses at $75 a shot and sit through a three-hour victim’s impact hearing.

Currently, Greg is about 10 days and $2,400 into his treatment at the BelAir Clinic.

"Treatment sessions are essentially about life skills," Greg explains. "We talk about what alcohol and drugs do to your body, about how you become addicted, about communication in relationships. They are full of interesting information, but they aren’t curing me of alcoholism."

"I suppose you would have to be an alcoholic to be cured," he says under his breath.

Greg says although the state considers him an alcoholic, he believes his behavior was not out of the ordinary.
percent, as Greg did, the sentence includes 48 hours of jail time, a 120-day driver's-license suspension and $1,200 in court fines.

However, deferred sentencing allows offenders to stay out of jail and keep their licenses. It also reduces both the base fine the offender must pay and the amount of time the conviction remains on their criminal record.

But the program does come with a catch.

"The statute says that deferred prosecution cannot be granted to a person who does not believe he or she is an alcoholic and does not admit to being guilty," Ross explains.

And when Combined Treatment Services, the state-certified evaluation center, declared that Greg had a problem, he didn't argue. After all, staying out of jail and keeping his license topped his list of priorities.

"The guidelines are strange," Greg says. "If you have a drink every year on Christmas, you can be an alcoholic because it's a ritual."

According to Greg, the evaluator asked general questions—how many times have you been drunk, how often do you drink, have you ever been sick from drinking—questions he believes many young men would answer similarly.

"I answered honestly," he says. "I could have lied, but I didn't. The questions were so obvious. If someone wanted to be an alcoholic to avoid going to jail, it wouldn't be hard to figure out the appropriate answers."

The judge admits that the "right" answers to some of the questions are apparent.

"On the surface, it's capable of being manipulated," Ross readily concedes.

"An alcoholic is someone who is controlled by alcohol or who is not in control of their drinking. I think my behavior is pretty typical; it's not very different from a lot of other college students."

Greg says he likes to have a good time; he loves playing pool, and he likes to have a drink while he plays. He also enjoys having a couple of beers while his eyes are glued to a basketball game on the big screen at a bar.

"I probably have a beer or two four or five days a week—sometimes more on the weekends," Greg says.

Greg does not consider this to be excessive drinking.

"Even the Surgeon General says two drinks a day is healthy for a man," he says, defending himself.

Regardless of the Surgeon General's opinion, publicly Greg must claim to have a drinking problem.

"I did have to say it in front of the evaluator, the judge and the doctor where I go to treatment," he says.

Greg's attorney recommended that he settle for deferred prosecution to lessen his sentence.

According to District Court Judge Edward Ross, a normal sentence for a first offense of driving under the influence (D.U.I.) depends upon the results of the Breathalyzer. For someone who blows more than 0.15 alcohol, as Greg did, the sentence includes 48 hours of jail time, a 120-day driver's-license suspension and $1,200 in court fines.

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A young woman positioned behind the food counter unties her apron strings and temporarily escapes her duties as an employee. She leaps the counter and makes her way to the court for the next game. Her shift has not ended, and no one has come to relieve her for a break. Even though she left her post unattended, and random people have begun to roam around behind the food counter and manager's office, she will not be reprimanded. The atmosphere here is not professional like a business but rather the casual atmosphere that swirls around family barbecues.

Every Monday night, dedicated people flock to the Whirly Ball of Washington Incorporated in Edmonds for a family bound not by blood, but by the love of each other's company and a sport most of the world has never heard of.

story by Fred Sheffield
photography by Stuart Martin
Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights are league night at the Whirly Ball Center, and on these nights, the building truly does become a home for some of the best, most passionate Whirly Ball players in the world.

The two glass-encased courts that resemble the strange love child of a basketball court and bumper car ring are the recreation room. A corridor filled with tables and chairs divides the two courts, this is the dining room. The kitchen consists of a hamburger grill, a French-fryer vat, and a refrigerator packed with varieties of beer and soda pop.

James Gill's eyes dart confidently around his Monday night home. He is one of the more prominent members of this family. In fact, according to many, he is the best Whirly Ball player in the world. As the stocky man in his late 20's sits at a table and gazes through the glass at a league game in progress, his eyes see things no one else notices.

"See this guy?" Gill says pointing at a bumper-car-like vehicle gliding down the court. "He's trying to set a screen for the guy with the ball. See, there are screens and stuff like that--just like in basketball."

Like basketball, Whirly Ball features two teams of five who battle to get the ball into a goal mounted on a backboard. But this is where the similarities to basketball end and Whirly Ball takes on an identity entirely its own.

All 10 players drive around a 4,000-square foot court in special bumper cars called Whirly Bugs. Their objective is to put a whiffle ball into a 15-and-a-quarter-inch hole in the backboard. To do this, they must forego the urge to use their hands and instead pass, shoot and pick up the ball using a Jai-Alai-style plastic scoop. A score is worth two points, unless it is shot from behind half court, in which case it's worth three.

While most people shoot around 2D percent from three-point land, Gill hits at about a 5D-percent clip.

"That's why they call me 'Three King," Gill says as he stretches a piece of masking tape over the bottom of his plastic scoop and places a whiffle ball inside. The word Trakball on the handle is the only clue that the scoop was intended to be used for a yard game invented by Whammo. In the hands of Gill, it is a precision instrument.

"If you don't have this tape on there, the ball will go all the way down and it might get stuck in there," Gill says. "I do it this way because you can get a quicker release and it makes it a lot easier to catch a hard pass. Have you ever been in an egg toss? When you catch it you have to go like that." Gill brings his hands together and in towards his body. "That's what you have to do with these and when you put the tape on there it just makes it a little easier."

As Gill's eyes return to the court, he points at a guy in a black sweatshirt with dark receding hair. "This guy here, Jason, you know, we call him 'the mole', he just burrows in there and finds a way to get a close lay-ups."

Gill looks toward a heavy-set man rumbling down the court in his Whirly Bug. "The big guy there, Garth, we call him 'Garthzilla' because he's so big. And that guy there is George Sibley. Sometimes he colors his hair purple so we call him 'purple George.' Everybody has different things that they do well."

The 10 championship banners that hang over the court indicate that many members of this family do a lot of things very well. Through 20 facilities from around the country send teams to the national tournament, the Edmonds center has been dominant. The years on the banners begin at 1988 and continue straight through to 1997.

"Basically we're like the Boston Celtics of Whirly Ball," Gill says. "We've got a major big dynasty going. If you were to take the best 50 players in the nation, probably 40 would come from here. It's just because we really coach our players to make them better. When we get new beginners, we pick out ones that are a little bit better than the rest and set up workshops on Sunday to coach them."

"Nobody will ever do what we've done in Whirly Ball again," said Tom Choquette, who has played a role in running the facility for all 12 of its years. "And we probably have even another two or three years before anyone even comes close to beating us. And if they come close we have systems that we can put in place."

Choquette overhears two players talking about the national tournament in a couple weeks and a look of confidence eases over his face.

"Everybody learns from us. We develop a system and go crush everyone and then when the rest of the country learns that system, we find something else to do and crush them all over again. We're about two jumps ahead of everybody so right now it's almost kind of boring for us. I'd like to see about 20 years of being undisputed champions so we're still got about 10 years to go. We can do it," he growls in a low voice. "Piece of cake."

Just by looking at him, it's easy to tell Croquette is the father figure of this Whirly Ball family. His dark
eyes and rugged face might be intimidating if they weren't offset with a warm smile.

"Tom's the kind of guy who—if you need a little work or a little help—will give you the shirt off his back. He's just a wonderful guy," says Bret Cornelius, a construction worker who has worked intermittently at the center.

Cornelius looks around and points to various people who have worked at the center or are working there now.

"We do all kinds of different things throughout the year," Cornelius says. "Once and a while, we'll do all-nighters where we'll be here for 20 hours straight. We do everything from playing LazerTag on the courts to just locking the doors and having a big party. We like to try a lot of new things because so many of us have been here for a long time."

"It's a huge family of people here that play Whirly Ball," Croquette says. "We work together, we play together, we vacation together—we do it all. We've had a lot of marriages through here—heck we even had one marriage in here."

"We papered off one whole court so you couldn't see it," Croquette says wistfully recalling the day Whirly Ball of Washington Incorporated in Edmonds was transformed into a wedding chapel. "We had ushers and bridesmaids all in a row. Then instead of throwing rice, we threw wiffle balls—yeah, it was great."

On each of the center's two courts, the final games of the evening are drawing to a close. Garthzilla puts up a three at the buzzer but it is wide left. As the players abandon their Whirly Bugs and head out into the lobby, they are greeted with other players who stuck around to watch. For a few minutes the lobby fills with Whirly Ball players. Their conversations are loud and brash, but at the same time, welcoming. No one is a stranger on Monday nights at the Whirly Ball center; everyone knows everyone. Employees are not pinned behind food counters; they too can take the whirly bugs for a spin around the courts.

The building follows the Monday-night ritual as well, shrugging off the professional ambience. It becomes a home to a clan of men, women and children. And, though their family might seem a little big, they're about as tight as any group can be.

"We've seen it all in here," Croquette says with a chuckle. "We haven't had a baby born here yet but I'm expecting that to happen too. Why not, everything else has."
Rocking back and forth in his kitchen chair, Jack Ondracek cracks a small but visible smile. He is thinking back to 11 years ago when he and his wife and their then 6- and 8-year-old daughters stumbled upon what is now surely thought of as one of the greatest achievements of their lives. He ponders for a moment or two, then he says, "Drive-in theaters are pure Americana—they define this country in so many ways."

The drive-in movie theater is a great relic of its day and perhaps a giant icon that, according to some, is experiencing a bit of a comeback. Whether nostalgia brings the flocks of movie-hungry people to empty gravel fields in search of a taste of simpler times and a walk down memory lane, or whether drive-ins are the trendy places that cater to today's family and teenage crowds, a case can be made that hanging out at the drive-in is still as hip and fresh as it was in the 1950s. Just ask Jack. He walked into the deal that gave him the rights to the Rodeo Drive-In located in Port Orchard.

"We walked in, they walked out, and the place just kept right on going. It had film, it had staff, it had concessions, and it also had an owner that wanted to get out real bad," Jack said. His smile beams as he shakes his head and sips some coffee.

"What normally shuts these things down?" he asks himself. "Owners get old, communities grow around the theater."

In the '50s, drive-ins were on the outskirts of town. Today, due to the growth of cities, they are fighting to stay alive.

"When a giant corporation comes into town and flashes a figure under your nose, it takes you three seconds to realize that you will never make it playing movies, and you sell your land off to Wal-Mart."

The Rodeo Drive-In either paints or sandblasts their screens every eight years at the cost of about $25,000 for three screens.

"It depends on where the screen is in relation to the weather, too," Jack says. "Two of our screens are exposed, but one isn't, making it easier to maintain."

Jack's 12-year-old daughter, Kayla, plays with her cat on the floor as Jack told the story of his drive-in. After a while, she jumps to her feet and curiously approaches her father. She slowly rests her head on his shoulder, flashes her puppy-dog eyes and says, "Daddy, can I have some lunch?"

After playfully arguing back and forth about what to make, she finally convinces him to let her have some chocolate milk. As she stumbles into the adjoining kitchen to prepare her lunch, Jack continues.

"The drive-in has been a really great environment for raising families," he professes. "Other independent owners, like myself, feel this way too."

The Ondraceks' made their last payment on the land and, as of last year, they own the Rodeo Drive-In outright. It's the largest outdoor, independently owned theater in Washington.

"It's a status thing for the girls; being associated with the drive-in makes them proud," Jack says.

"It's a status thing for you too," Cindy Ondracek, Jack's other half chuckles.

As Jack continues on, he switches to a lighthearted topic. "Nowadays the most important parts of a drive-in are the screens and the concession stands."

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A bit of a giggle slips out of Jack's mouth.

"No, but they do walk tall," he says as he gazes at Kayla who is preparing her favorite lunch in the kitchen. She turns around with
chocolate in the corners of her mouth and grins, nodding her head in agreement.

Cindy also plays an intricate part in their business. "I am in charge of a lot of the behind the scenes stuff," she says as she rubs her daughter's head. "It has been wonderful to raise a family out here. We really only have each other, since we are on the outskirts of town. We heavily rely on one another to get through the, sometimes, rigorous schedule of the spring and summer months," she says.

As he watches Kayla stir her chocolate milk, Jack begins to describe the hotdogs and hamburgers that are available at the concession stand nightly.

"We aren't talking about just any old hamburger that was made three hours before, in order to deal with the rush. We make fresh, made-to-order hamburgers with all the fixin's possible." Jack is holding an incredibly over-exaggerated, imaginary hamburger in his hands that is the size of a basketball. He licks his upper lip.

"It's a love-hate relationship," Jack says. "We hate the smell of popcorn and grease by the time October rolls around, but we are craving it when March comes."

Cindy nods and rolls her eyes in agreement.

Jack continues to talk about raising his family on the drive-in property.

"We also never have a need for security out here," he says. "We have never had any vandalism or thefts," he pauses. "Except for the occasional person getting up on the marquee sign and changing the letters around."

His 18-year-old daughter, Cheryl comes down the stairs and begins laughing. She has overheard her father's comment. "Kids will be kids, I guess," Jack sighs as he glances at his second-eldest daughter. She smiles and nods.

The property taxes on the piece of land are more than $12,000 a year, making it a hard package to sell, which is exactly how the owners like it.

The quest for drive-in entertainment was started back in 1935 by Richard M. Hollingsworth, Jr. He developed a ramp system in which the front of each car was inclined so that optimum viewing pleasure could be achieved. On June 6, 1935, 10 months after parking cars in different arrangements on his lawn, he created the first outdoor cinema, Camden Drive-In Theatre. It opened to a full house. Hollingsworth found a way to combine America's two great love affairs—the automobile and the movies.

Outdoor movie theaters began sprouting up all over the United States. Ironically, most were built in smaller towns and rural communities. Drive-ins helped to shape the American landscape, which in turn shaped American history.

Technology has changed considerably since the age of hanging a metal box on the driver's side window. At the Rodeo Drive-In, as with most operational drive-ins today, a transmitter feeds the sound of the picture into the car radio, a hand-held radio or a boom box, through an FM frequency.

"For 50 years, drive-ins asserted their place in American culture as meccas for restless young families and amorous teenagers," said Don Sanders, author of "The American Drive-In Theater." "These great American icons of post-war prosperity reached their popular apogee in the late 1950s when some 5,000 drive-ins dotted the American landscape. Today, there are fewer than 900."

The Ondracek family is proud and committed to one of those 900 drive-in theater. Jack worked at the local drive-in in the Port Townsend community throughout his high school days. He has a close relationship with the owner and is able to visit and help with repairs when necessary.

"Working for him put me through school," Jack says as he looks up at the old ceiling of his house, which has been transformed from the manager's quarters and ticket booth back in the '40s, '50s and '60s. "I really admire him for all he has done," Jack says.

The Rodeo Drive-In, originally one of the chain of United Drive-Ins, was built in 1946 and was used as a single-screen drive-in that held a few more than 600 cars. In 1978, a new box-office structure was built along with two new screens in the back of the property that each have a 225-car capacity. The concession stand was also built in '78, taking away a few of the back rows from the main screen, making its current capacity about 450 cars.

"It works well for us," Jack says in reference to the set up of the screens and amount of cars each lot can hold. "We are able to put the most popular movie on the big screen and leave the smaller screens for other films."

He is also glad to have a multiplex, versus a single-screen theater, due to the rate of movie turnover. With a multiplex, films can be juggled around to satisfy everyone at once.
"With one-screen theaters, managers need to worry about having return customers, which is why they have to switch movies a lot more often," he says. The Rodeo opens in mid-March and runs on weekends until June, when they switch to seven nights a week.

"When school schedules change so do ours; lifestyles in this community are run by school," Jack says as he notices his youngest daughter, who struts down the stairs to see what is going on.

"The end of the drive-in theater days are not easy to see," Jack says as if he knows something only he can understand.

He has worked in the same business for more than 30 years. He is able to chart the rises and declines, innovations and setbacks, hopes of the industry and fears that may have already come true. He knows the ins and outs of the technology, the quirky aspects that keep Americans coming back to drive-ins and the way to cook a made-to-order hamburger that will send smells wafting into the air to attract even the most screen-focused moviegoer.

He knows how to turn the other cheek when teenagers are fooling around in their cars. He knows when to get tough and throw people out after they try to sneak in under blankets. He can pick movies that are going to best suit his Kitsap Peninsula audience and he knows how to mow the lawns so that the job only takes two days instead of three.

"If this land is ultimately sold then that is the way it will be," Jack says. "I know that I will be around for awhile longer, so I don't think we are going anywhere real soon."

Jack and his family have a product they hope will continue to prosper. He doesn't feel that the future can be predicted, though it would be nice to see what the next movie-going trend brings. As Cindy leaves for karate class, she kisses her husband and says, "You certainly picked the Yoda of drive-ins."
A preacher's wife in her early 20s, struggling to make the mortgage payment, to indulge a husband's whims—fueled by conversations with God—and raising three children while striving to rediscover the pulse of an identity, Sharon Rupp has lived. She has mingled with rare, fleeting moments of bliss and has persevered through the innumerable bad times.

At 43, Rupp could pen a lengthy tome on the trials of a modern-day housewife. It would go something like this: give up a full scholarship to Montana State University to marry your high-school sweetheart, have three children and live a tranquil, comfortable life of domesticity. Your husband, who follows the ubiquitous signs of God, enrolls in Ministry 101, taking the family on the road to spread his version of the gospel. Only the plan derails one day when you return home to discover your husband's gone, never to return, leaving you and the children, no more than a high school education and no recourse—save for public assistance. So you make the pilgrimage to the local welfare office, and you connect, on several levels, with the statistics, the winding row of people who shuffle with fragility, their subdued voices swirling and spilling forth but never ringing intelligibly, never loud or shrill enough. You admire the capricious feet of children and the chime of scurrying excitement that tears through the monotony of "next person, please." The swell of depression emits a pungent odor. It is here, standing in line, requesting a welfare subsidy, that you find your voice. It comes to you as an epiphany. You are an artist, the one creative utility that cannot be suppressed. It is your voice, and its spreads its wings in a sonorous flight.

"When I was standing in line, shaking the people's hands because I was a preacher's wife and was used to doing that, I realized how much pain they were in and struggling, they needed a voice because no one would speak to them," Rupp explained. "The reason I'm an artist is because I can't not do art. I've got to get it out of my system, get it out there. It possesses me."

Rupp's proclivity and passion for art were renewed in the years after her first husband left when she returned to college to complete her bachelor of arts degree. She began seriously producing art at a feverish rate. Her work has adorned the walls and pillars at the Carnegie Arts Center in Walla Walla and the Columbia Basin College in the Tri-Cities.

In February of 1996, Rupp installed three pieces for
display in the Pasco City Hall's "gallery," as part of a trial arts program to showcase local artists. The bronze sculptures embodied her signature style. Rife with social and political intimations, her hallmark is the glorious nude female: full breasts, erect nipples and solid legs, often squirming or in positions of despair or wretched revolt.

Rupp's integrity as an artist—and as a woman—has been irreparably flayed, her private life exposed and her fidelity to her craft tested—largely because of her passion for expression. She could not have foreseen the resistance her message would encounter from Pasco city employees.

"My voice was silenced when my work was locked away in the vault at Pasco City Hall," Rupp said.

Rupp and another Tri-Cities artist, Janette Hopper, said the actions of Pasco City Hall constitute censorship. Pasco City Hall stands by its decision to pull three of Rupp's bronze sculptures and to rescind its invitation to Hopper to showcase her linoleum prints.

At the crux of the conflict is a bronze plaque housed in a display case on the Pasco City Hall's main floor as part of an "Art in Public" program sponsored by Pasco, in conjunction with the Mid-Columbia Region Arts Council, to exhibit emerging local artists.

This piece, entitled "To the Democrats, Republicans and Bi-Partisans," exposes a robust female nude, head, breasts and vagina submerged in negative space and ingrained in the bronze—but whose buttocks are well-defined, protruding outward, moaning her peers. The figure unabashedly expresses disdain for the government and the bureaucratic red-tape that has ensnared her both personally and professionally.

Pasco City Hall has since pulled its "Art in Public" program in an effort to eschew the controversy that exploded when the city removed Rupp's works.

"On the advice of our attorney, we terminated the program," said Kurt Luhrs, Pasco City Hall personnel manager. An installation of historical photographs hangs in city hall now.

Rupp still cannot understand why her work inspired such controversy. "Any time we see nudes, we think sex, nasty, fornication," Rupp said. "There's a difference between nude art when it is used as a metaphor and nude art as sexual exploitation. I'm very afraid of being an artist in a world where mild, innocuous nudity can't be tolerated."

In the artists' defense, a close-knit group of citizens and the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington publicly disavowed the City's actions. Rupp expressed herself fervently in a civil suit filed against the City of Pasco and the Mid-Columbia Region Arts Council.

Soon, Rupp would learn that members of her community were not willing to rally behind her fight. She was turned away by artist collectives that once openly embraced her.

Remarkably, in a region of Eastern Washington that boasts cultural and artistic diversity, an enclave exists where terms such as "obscene," "prurient" and "pornographic" are couched in everyday pleasantries exchanged among neighbors.

Neither Luhrs nor Crutchfield took immediate action in removing the piece, but in his deposition Crutchfield said he "was concerned that the controversy was interfering with the conduct of city business."

"They wanted me to remove the crack from the butt of the piece because the crack was objectionable," Rupp said, her voice disoriented. "I refused to come down and remove the crack. Instead, I offered to put a brown paper bag over the piece and write on it, 'Censored by Pasco City Hall.'"

Luhrs maintains he never told Rupp to remove the crack.

On Feb. 15, 1996, Rupp's art was removed from the exhibit and placed in the city's vault. In an effort to honor her three-month contract, Rupp didn't get custody of her work until the contract expired.

"The city asked her to remove her art several times and she refused," Luhrs stated. "So we put it in the vault until she picked it up.

"Rupp has since seen the frightening underbelly of antag-
onism, manifested in the form of a kicked-in front door, sha-
tered windows and slashed tires. It has been particularly dif-
icult for her children.

Rupp relates how her youngest child, a boy, is berated at school with questions about his mother, subjected to denigration by some parents who've deemed her work "perverse" and "sick."

Prior to this controversy, Rupp was active in her children's art classes at school, often teaching the value of art to children of all ages. Now her classroom visits are infrequent.

"People don't view me as someone who has an entire body of work," Rupp explained. "I'm known as the 'butt woman,' and parents are now looking at me as someone who's nasty and who children need to be protected from." Rupp's son expressed his feelings about his mother's art one afternoon. "I was sitting at the kitchen table working on a wax mold for a sculpture when my son came in and was looking at me and he said, 'Mom, can you please not..."
do anymore naked people? It causes me problems at school," Rupp relayed.

'I had to look at him and tell him that everything these people were saying was wrong, that I had a right to do this, and he doesn’t need to be embarrassed.'

'I've had to re-evaluate what kind of parent I am.' Recently, Rupp's lawsuit, which was slated to go to trial in Spokane in early May, was dismissed. Federal Judge Fred Van Sickle granted the defense's motion for a summary judgment on March 30, 1998, saying the rights of "offended" city workers "should be considered above the sensibilities of rejected artists."

The court agreed with the city's contention that by displaying these artists' work, it is offending its employees and citizens.

'Art for art's sake enjoys First Amendment protection, but the city didn't remove and/or decline to display the pieces because of [Rupp and Hopper's] viewpoints," Van Sickle said. "They were removed because regardless of an artist's viewpoint, bare rumps and cavorting nude couples are not family fare."

Doug Honig, ACLU Education Director and member of Rupp's legal team, sees the actions on the part of the Pasco City Hall as censorship.

"When art is not allowed to be seen because someone doesn’t like it, and it is taken down, it is censorship," he said. "The government cannot discriminate on art based on speech. Public officials cannot refuse to show art based on its content."

In May the ACLU decided, along with Rupp and Hopper, to appeal Van Sickle's decision.

Rupp is naturally disappointed by Judge Van Sickle's decision.

'Artists should be challenging us. There should be a challenge with the art we see," she said. 'From our theaters to our authors and songwriters, we should be challenged. Challenge our belief systems and make us second guess ourselves.'

Uncertain whether she'll ever show in a public forum comparable to the space at Pasco City Hall, Rupp and her husband are contemplating leaving Kennewick. However, if she had to do it all again, she would.

"When this first started, there were times when I thought I was going to quit, but I've gotten stronger. I'll always be encouraging people to take a stance against censorship. Don't ever let a vocal minority make a decision for you."

Rupp's voice may have been stifled by controversy and censorship, but it cannot be silenced.

"I think my work is going to get stronger because of this."
Skin

story by Sarah Erlebach
photography by Tim Klein
Drunken young sailors recline in dirty, plastic chairs. Barefoot men holding needles walk through the darkened room. A gopher runs to huy someone heer—he gets to keep the change—and another group of sailors reels in, pointing at patterns on the walls and laughing.

Colin Howser spent more than his fair share of time in Filipino tattoo parlors. He didn’t mind when he was a 21-year-old sailor, but today he shudders, recalling the conditions of the shops.

“No gloves, no breaking the needles out of the pack. They would boil them, I saw them boil them, but...” he paused, “Just a dirty shop. They don’t have as many sanitation rules there, or rules about being sober.”

Howser said he never had second thoughts about getting any tattoo, until he sobered up.

“I was drunk every time,” he smiled ruefully. “There was always that twinge. I would think afterwards, ‘Maybe I shouldn’t have gotten that’.”

Determined to get five of his six tattoos removed, Howser chalks his about-face up to maturity. He will keep his Popeye tattoo, as a reminder of his Navy days, but the rest must go.

“The death ones, I want off. What am I going to be, a 40-year-old professional man with a bunch of skulls on me? No. I’ve outgrown it, I’m no longer that person.”

“A lot of people in the Navy have tattoos,” he said. “The only Navy tattoo I figured I’d get is Popeye. He’s fighting.”

He admitted it is not a given that a sailor will get tattooed, but, as he put it, many young men think it represents a coming-of-age ritual. They feel they must join in.

“I compare it to getting a brand-new poster. You buy it, you put it up on your wall, and for a while you keep looking up at it, enjoying it,” Howser explained. “You do the same thing with a tattoo. You look down at your arm, and think it’s cool. But when you get sick of the poster, you can take it down.”

“There are a lot of things you can put behind you,” he said thoughtfully. “You forget, or nobody knows, but a tattoo is permanent.”

Howser is fortunate. He kept his body art confined to areas he can cover.

“At 18, you’re not ready to make a decision that’s going to be stuck on your arm, or your chest, or your ass,” he said, with a convincing surety in his voice. “People definitely need to think about it. People getting tattoos now just mean more people saying, ‘I wish I didn’t have these,’ later on.”

The expansion of tattoos into the realm of the purely decorative has been gradual. Now, with an estimated 20 million tattooed Americans, and tattoos showing up on people of wildly disparate lifestyles, it is only natural that removal becomes a greater concern. These regretful people, many ex-military, keep the burgeoning tattoo-removal business brisk.

At the Northwest Dermatology & Laser Skin.
Treatment Center in Bellingham, across the street from St. Joseph Hospital, Dr. Stan Gilbert performs tattoo-removal surgery.

Dr. Gilbert, in an immaculate white lab coat, seconds Howser's plea for people to carefully consider their commitments when contemplating tattooing.

"It's a lot more expensive and painful to get rid of it than it is to get it," he said, even with the new laser technology. "Some people don't realize that. They have that big toucan on their arm up to their elbow, covered with yellow and green. It's virtually impossible to remove that without leaving a big scar."

A tattoo may be completely cut out and stitched up, or sanded until the dye and surrounding skin is rubbed off.

"If you have a small tattoo cut out, all you feel is the anesthetic. Sanding would definitely be the most painful method. The laser stings a bit while you do it and burns for a few hours afterward," Gilbert cautioned, sipping from his coffee cup.

The greatest advantage to laser treatment is the possibility of no scarring. If a tattoo is excised—cut out—several scars appear. If a tattoo is sanded, a reddish-white scar, like a burn scar, almost always remains.

Gilbert works with a Yag laser when removing tattoos. The laser is pricey, between $100,000 and $200,000, so Gilbert rents one for just a few days each month. To remove the tattoo, the laser emits light focused to a specific wavelength, exploding pigment cells of the corresponding color. The pigment particles are small enough for white blood cells to carry away. It takes from one to three months for the pigments from one treatment to disappear.

Gilbert said it takes an average of six costly treatments to remove most tattoos:

- The price depends on the size of the tattoo and the number of treatments it's going to take. I tell people the average number of treatments, at $300 each, for a small-to-medium tattoo," he said. "If someone comes in with a whole arm or back, of course that's more time and more money."

The room where the removals take place resembles a dentist's office more than a hospital room, with a vinyl recliner at its center. The laser takes up nearly a quarter of the meager floor space.

The dermatologist performs removals himself. He described the process as similar to painting with a wand, going over pigmented areas at 10 light pulses a second. Many patients describe the sensation as a sting, as if a rubber band snapped against their skin.

Gilbert agreed, adding, "If you have 10 snaps per second, and a six-by-four-inch tattoo, that's a lot of snaps. It's more painful than getting a tattoo, (all patients) say that."

Despite the pain, people remove tattoos for a variety of reasons, Gilbert said.
Sometimes it is a significant other, or they just hate it and want to get rid of it, or they’re changing careers or starting careers, sometimes their parents want them to take it off. It usually has to be self-motivated, or they won’t do it.’

Gilbert believes people need to realize which tattoos are treatable. He says the brightest colors are not absorbed well, and newer tattoos have fluorescent greens, yellows and oranges in abundance.

For a large tattoo, Gilbert might use laser treatment on the blues and browns, then excise the brighter colors.

‘Or tell them to wait,’ he proposed, leaning against the Formica counter, ‘until the technology gets better.’

Howser said pain and expense are not the only reasons why people should deliberate carefully before getting a tattoo.

‘Now you have people working professional jobs with long hair and tattoos and earrings, things that weren’t accepted before,’ he said. ‘Now, they’re just accepted. But tattoos still carry a bad image if you’re trying to get a job some places.’

‘You may not have as wide a selection,’ he clarified. ‘In certain fields, where it does matter, you may lose out right at the bat if they happen to see a tattoo—especially if people get tattoos someplace visible, like the back of their hands.’

Although attitudes toward purely decorative tattoos have relaxed in recent years, since as early as 1500 B.C., tattoos have identified and grouped people. Whether it be the deeply scored faces associated with certain tribes, or a fleur de lis, branding a thief for all to see, tattoos are an obvious, permanent system of classification.

Tattoos still categorize people. The permanence of a tattoo can identify its wearer with a certain association. Take the anchors found on Navy men, for example, or the Harleys and naked ladies on Hell’s Angels. Tattoos are a perpetual reminder of who a person is or once was. Removal allows those who wear tattoos as labels to shed their symbols of affiliation.

Rolling his shoulders so the cuff of his shirt rucks up, Howser revealed the jawbone of a flaming skull on his right bicep.

‘A tattoo becomes just a part of your body,’ he said as he eyeballed the glowing coal of his cigarette. ‘I don’t notice it much except when other people try to pull up my sleeve and ask, “What’s that? What’s that?” Then I get really embarrassed.’

‘I kind of got them to show,’ he confessed. ‘And it was fine when I was a Navy guy. Now it is strictly embarrassing.’

‘Maybe they don’t regret it five years after they get it,’ he said. ‘But they might after 10, when their skin deteriorates a little bit and their tattoo becomes a big blob. Who’s going to think it’s cool then?”
sustained (ˈsəntəd), adj. Maintained at length without interruption, weakening, or losing in power or quality; prolonged; unflagging; as, sustained interest or enthusiasm; a sustained style. — sus-tain-ed-ly (-ˈtən-əd-I); adj.

sustainer (ˈsəntər), n. 1. One who or that which sustains. 2. A sustainer.
sustain, adj. That sustains; serving as a prop or support; strengthening; nourishing; as, sustaining walls or principles. — sus-tain-ing-ly, adv.
sustainment (ˈsəntən-mənt), n. [Cf. OE. squatneamento.

story by Scott Morris
photography by Justin Coyne
Fenton Wilkinson has a plan for Whatcom County. It's ambitious, yet simple. He's not a bureaucrat or regulator for any government agency. Nevertheless, he has a vision for how to steer the county's economy away from destructive overgrowth and export-dependent policies, toward something more self-sufficient, sustainable and local.

It all starts with a $25 box of groceries.

"If I could deliver you a box of organically grown local fruits and vegetables for the same price it would cost you to go and buy conventionally grown food yourself at the grocery store," Wilkinson asks, "wouldn't you do that?"

Through his business, Full Circle Foods, Wilkinson is offering a box of organic produce that includes: four Gala apples, two grapefruits, four navel oranges, six bananas, four Bartlett pears, one lemon, one pound of tomatoes, a half-pound of onions, one-and-a-half pounds of broccoli, spinach and one acorn squash.

All of this costs $25, the same as the cost of conventional produce at a grocery store. Yet Full Circle customers need only pick up their weekly boxes at a pre-arranged delivery site.

So, how is this going to transform Whatcom County?

"The only way you can preserve farmland," Wilkinson says, "is to make it valuable as farmland, which then combats development, which, in turn, enables people to spend local."

Walking up to his converted hayloft office in the barn behind his home near Everson, it would be easy to mistake Wilkinson for a farmer. The air smells of horses, mud and hay. The heavily rutted tracks leading from his yard into the back pasture show that the tractor doesn't just stay in the barn.

Certain visual clues give him away, however. A picture shows Fenton in full English regalia, riding his horse in competition. The computer, fax machine and modem all hint at an urban past. But the true gumshoe would fixate on the throne-sized leather chair that dwarfs Wilkinson's compact frame.

The chair is a memento from his years as a lawyer, first in Richmond, Va., then in Greenville, N.C., and then in Seattle. It is the only noticeable pretention for a man who was first in his law class.

During his years battling legal cases, Wilkinson brushed elbows with policymakers in many levels of government. As he learned how society makes its decisions, he started to think about how to improve the process.

Wilkinson is not the first person to realize that an economic system based on unlimited growth makes no sense in a finite world. But unlike many people, who never move beyond theoretical rhetoric, Wilkinson has been experimenting with "sustainability" projects for more than a decade—12 years of false starts, banging his head repeatedly against a three-word brick wall:

"It won't work."
The vast majority of people believe in only the things that have already happened," Wilkinson says, explaining the three-word response he has heard so often. "To me, the quickest way to change policy is to go prove that it works. Prove what's possible—not the answer, 'cause there is no answer."

Wilkinson calls his grand scheme, "The Whatcom County Project," which aims to transform the county into a sustainable community. Within this scheme, his demonstration projects wobble like Weebles all over the place. An organic-farmers-growers club falls apart, only to resurface as Full Circle Foods, a food-buying club. Local businesses tinker with their own currency; it fades out of use, then resurfaces in a different form. Rural communities propose ecoforestry experiments to the timber industry, despite skepticism and rejection. No matter how many times they get knocked down, these projects keep popping back up.

In the first example, Wilkinson sees Full Circle Foods as a demonstration project for others to look to as an example of how to make the county's farmland more valuable. Instead of buying produce that has been transported from other states or nations, Whatcom County residents could start to support local farmers. When he first started approaching people with his idea for supporting local agriculture, he was greeted with furrowed brows, skeptical attitudes and shaking heads.

"It won't work," they all told me," Wilkinson says. "'Everybody knows that the cost of local food is much higher,' they said."

Unconvinced, Wilkinson wanted to see for himself. A grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture through Utah State University allowed him to study sustainable food systems for a year. He found examples of farmers who had managed to carve out niche markets for themselves, successfully competing against much larger agricultural conglomerates.

Full Circle Foods was conceived soon after. At first, Wilkinson based his business on the community-supported-agriculture (CSA) model, in which growers form cooperatives and then seek members of the community to commit to buying shares of the season's harvest.

But even though CSAs have proven successful elsewhere (the United States has more than 500 CSAs, with a 12-percent annual growth rate), in this case, it didn't work. The organic farmers already had their hands full simply getting the harvest out. The added time and energy required to coordinate the distribution to the customers proved too difficult.

Wilkinson has a string of failed projects so long it would crush the average American. But he doesn't have time to feel sorry for himself; he's too busy learning from his mistakes so he can modify his next attempt to prove the naysayers wrong.

Over time, Wilkinson has refined his philosophy with each false start. Now, he is applying the Japanese principles of aikido to each new project proposal. Aikido teaches practitioners how to use an opponent's own momentum to gain the advantage in a fight.

"Now, I'm practicing what I call the aikido of social change," he says. "Give people the opportunity to do things you want them to do, but for their own reasons."

Wilkinson wants people to buy their food from local growers, but the idea has yet to catch on. Undaunted, now he is applying aikido. Everybody wants to save
time and money. The challenge, therefore, is to start with these desires and build a project around them. “My study found that people spend about an hour a week buying groceries,” Wilkinson says, “which is time they’d rather spend doing something else.”

Do the shopping for people, he reasons, providing organic food at conventional prices, and people will simply follow their own desires, which is exactly what he wants them to do.

“This way,” he says with a laugh, “if people say it won’t work, I can say, ‘No, no, no, you’re already doing it.”

Wilkinson has now changed Full Circle Foods from a CSA to a food-buying club. Simply by joining, members can save time and money on their groceries, whether they care about supporting local organic farmers or not. This type of cooperative unites individual consumers, who pool their resources so they can make large enough food orders to deal directly with distributors, or even growers. By cutting out the middle people, some clubs have saved 20 percent on their groceries.

Wilkinson’s vision does not stop with cheap, organic groceries. He foresees a local currency floating around Whatcom County, completely independent of Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve and George Washington’s face.

Again, he’s not just dreaming.

“Eight years ago, we tried to establish a local currency,” Wilkinson says, “based on the L.E.T.S. (Local Exchange Trading System) currency developed by a guy in B.C.”

Local currencies have also been devised in towns such as Berkeley, Calif., and Ithaca, N.Y., as a way to encourage patronage of local businesses, instead of regional or national chains. L.E.T.S. bills circulate within the local economy. George Washington’s, however, zip from WalMart cash registers straight to corporate headquarters, leaving empty local downtowns in their wake.

“There was a lot of philosophical resonance for the local currency,” Wilkinson says. “We had 125 to 150 interested people who joined.”

But, again, it didn’t work.

“The local currency in Bellingham didn’t break into the mainstream,” he says.

“So, I’ve just been biding my time,” he says. “Up until six months ago, there was not a whole lot of local interest.”

Now, however, Wilkinson has found several people willing to start fresh. Abandoning the L.E.T.S. model, they have devised a social alchemy model that works with capitalist incentives instead of against them.

First, they will put together a list of 50 to 150 local non-profit organizations and charities that could use money. Then, they will ask local businesses if they would like to support these non-profits through a unique arrangement: part of their tax-deductible donations will be expressed in the new currency, instead of dollar amounts.

Wilkinson remains optimistic that this new idea will catch on because of the increasing viability of the organic community in this region. While the L.E.T.S. bills stood alone as their own initiative, the organic food market in Whatcom County could provide the backbone for the new currency.

“Food is a wonderful backing for a local currency,” he says.

Wilkinson’s plans don’t stop with food and money. He has been pitching a sophisticated ecoforestry idea to private and state timber managers to work in conjunction with local communities. He still thinks the day will come when his original dream—solar energy—will become a sustainable reality.

Twelve years into testing his dreams, people are still telling Wilkinson that he is swinging at windmills. The grower co-op, the local currency, the ecoforestry project—none of these have caught on. Wilkinson, undeterred, doesn’t waste much time worrying that others choose to see the glass half-empty.

“I’m an incurable optimist,” he says with a mischievous grin, eyes twinkling. “Even if none of this ever comes to be, at least I had those optimistic years.”