

**State of the County
Better Ways for Better Days
February 4, 2010**

**Steve Stuart
Chair, Board of Clark County Commissioners**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for attending the 24th annual State of the County address. I am pleased to be talking with you in this wonderful high school where my son Jeb graduated. I'd like to thank Skyview for hosting us, and the Skyview Jazz Band under the direction of Steve Robertson for getting us off on the right note.

Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to recognize the other members of your Commissioner team – and we are a team. Being Chair means I have the honor of standing here today and signing the paperwork this year, but we work together as equals, with a collective eye toward serving you.

Commissioner Marc Boldt, with whom I've had the honor to serve since 2005, led with distinction as our Chair last year. He has the best gut I've ever known for how to best serve the citizens of Clark County.

Commissioner Tom Mielke, who began his service on this team in 2009, brings renewed energy and focus on supporting individual citizens who need our help to be successful.

Our County Administrator, Bill Barron, has served this community since 1998. He manages our County with wisdom, humility, and an amazing ability to adapt to changing challenges and evolving Boards.

With my thanks, would you three gentlemen please stand and be recognized for the work you do every day for our citizens?

Thanks, also, to the elected officials introduced earlier. Looking for ways to improve services, elected officials around the county have seized opportunities to better serve our residents through collaboration. I'll talk about that later, but for now, would you all please stand so we can recognize and thank you?

I'd also like to thank our outstanding Youth Commission. Members age 11 through 19 from all around Clark County provide young people's points-of-view to the Board of County Commissioners, county departments, cities, and community organizations. They've been invaluable to me in preparing this address, with direct help and by suggesting new ways for us to connect with our citizens.

And an important thank you goes to all County employees. You have worked tirelessly, creatively and effectively over the past year as we confronted and overcame challenge after challenge. For your dedication to serving the people of Clark County, your ingenuity and your can-do attitude, I thank you.

There are a few members of the Clark County family that I'd like to specifically thank. Mary Keltz, Holley Gilbert, Joni McAnally, Holly Gaya, Jane Leonard, Sara Eckhardt, and the rest of our County staff, thank you for your incredible help getting my address and this event together. And CVTV, thank you for the great videos on our Spirit of Clark County Award winners, and for your help covering this event.

Finally, I'd like to thank my own family who's here today – Mom, Joan; Dad, Ned; my wife Heather and my mom-in-law, Holly. My son Jeb is away at college and hopefully in class right now. My drive to serve is because of what I've learned from you and continues because of the support I receive from you.

You know that old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times?" Well, last year was not just interesting, it was unprecedented.

Worldwide, we saw economies slow or collapse and terrorism in too many places, taking too many lives. And this year has started with heartbreaking devastation in Haiti.

At the national level, we saw massive debt, billions in bailouts, and banks slow to reinvest in families and small businesses. At the state level, 9.5 percent of our fellow Washington residents were unemployed in December. Many more have grappled with significant reductions in their incomes and businesses.

Locally, one of our own banks failed; many families still are having a tough time making ends meet; and 13.8 percent of us in Clark County were officially unemployed at the end of 2009 – one of the highest county rates in the state. Thanks to everyone who brought a donation of non-perishable food today. The Salvation Army will see that your gift reaches some of these families.

People are struggling. I understand that. The Board understands that. These are some of the toughest times we've faced, as individuals and as a community. Just in the County organization, we were forced to lay off dozens during three budget reductions in the past year. They were not statistics to us. They were our colleagues and neighbors, with families to feed and responsibilities to meet. Seeing them go, along with the services they provided, has been tough.

It's easy to dwell on those struggles and let them drag you into a dark place. I know this because I've had those moments. But dwelling in darkness doesn't help anyone, so we head for the light, looking for strength and inspiration. And we find it in people such as Vancouver residents Joe Markee, a retired physician, and his wife, Linda Markee, a registered nurse, who gave up their comforts here at home and went with Medical Teams International to Haiti to ease the suffering there.

We also rediscover our own determination to overcome struggles and tough times. That's who we are. We are the beneficiaries of more than 160 years of countywide ingenuity, cooperation, perseverance and strength. We have survived and thrived in the past, and we will do it again today and tomorrow.

And we will be better individuals, better public servants and a better community when we come out of this recession. We are finding better ways for better days. It is what gets me up every morning. Better. Constantly recognizing our strengths; building on them; and finding new ways to better serve you.

We all are better for our struggles because we learn from them. We as a Board and a County continue to learn from them. For example, last year we began to meet each month with elected and appointed officials and union representatives to monitor fiscal trends. Although this is a common practice in the private sector, it is a relatively new one in the public sector. We were able to see problems and make decisions in “real time,” making us more proactive than reactive, and our plan is to continue this practice.

As a result of those meetings, in the past year we have cut more than 22 percent of our general fund budget – down to 2003-04 levels, when we had 59,000 fewer county residents.

Those cuts were necessary and offered lessons moving forward. Our employees found efficiencies that filled one-third of the budget hole while saving service and jobs. The work we did helped us learn we need to continue getting better at prioritizing the services people most need and want, so our focus is on best providing those services. The new normal for Clark County must be a leaner, more coordinated service-delivery system.

This year, we will meet with every county elected official and department head to assess how everything we do fits with our mission of serving you better. We will identify how each department’s goals align with that mission, and how the strategies and specific day-to-day work help move us toward it. This way, we will create a “priorities of government” process and a county government that always has a long-term eye to improving service to taxpayers – you, the people who pay the bills.

We are learning to better listen to you, and combine our talents and resources more often. We can’t do it alone. To be able to better meet the needs of our growing population, we have learned to turn more often to partnerships with the community.

Partnerships work. Recently, we collaborated with four groups – Coastal Conservation Association, Clark-Skamania Flyfishers, Vancouver Wildlife League and Fish First – and were able to keep boat launches on the Lewis River open for winter steelhead fishing even though the county no longer had money for maintenance in January and February. By working toward a common goal, we’ve been able to better serve some who, even in the cold, enjoy the beauty and bounty of our natural resources -- with apologies to the fish.

Partnerships are helping provide some of our most vulnerable residents the services the County can no longer provide. Clark County Public Health lost \$8.2 million in state and federal revenues and 45 percent of its staff. To ensure that people still get the services they need, we turned to Sea Mar Community Health Centers. They added capacity to serve, and we’re working closely with them to make sure the partnership is as successful as the H1N1 clinics were last fall.

Some partners are in as much need as we are. To explain this, I need some partners right now. Would all the current students here with us today please stand and stay standing?

State budget cuts have hit our schools and more cuts could be on the way. If our community is to be sustainable, our school systems must be sustainable so our children become responsible members of society and well-prepared for the workforce. So please, support your school district's replacement operating levy on next week's Special Election ballot. Will you stand, all those of you who support these young people and the schools that teach them? Please stand with those kids now.

Thank you, all of you, for supporting our schools, thank you, young people, for making sure our future is bright, and thank you for helping illustrate the point that we're in it together. Please feel free to take your seats.

Some partnerships are just starting. We recently created the non-profit incubator project, opening empty space at the County to help small organizations such as Dream Big find their footing and grow in public service. We're also working with seasoned organizations such as the Humane Society for Southwest Washington, which partnered with Clark County, its businesses and its people, and in 2009 opened a new shelter that doubled the capacity for dogs and tripled the capacity for cats, saving 20 percent more lives.

Behind every new non-profit there are people with the passion to help. I'd like to introduce one of those people now.

Billy Henry turned 18 in December, but already he has contributed greatly to this community. He's a senior at Hudson's Bay High School, an athlete, an aspiring businessman and the co-founder, at age 15, of a non-profit that helps hundreds of Northwest youth. He's also legally blind. I've asked Billy to share his story, his work, his passion, with us today. Please join me in welcoming Billy Henry.

BILLY HENRY SPEAKS

Thank you so much Billy for sharing your experiences with us. Thank you for the work you do to make our community better. Thank you for your courage – and I don't mean just standing up here today in front of all these suits.

Billy saw a need and filled it. Similarly, the County Commissioners aren't waiting for an economic turnaround to simply renew the ways of the past. The ground has shifted and we're moving with it. We consider the downtime an opportunity to change our ways, to help spur better days for our economy.

And that means more jobs. We have to get people back on payrolls and off the unemployment rolls. It's not particularly groundbreaking information, but creating opportunities for jobs here is our top concern and the focus of much of what we do as county commissioners. Our community's sustainable success depends on it.

So, we learn from our economic past. The construction industry has been a huge and valued economic driver in Clark County. But when the housing market crashed nationwide, a pillar of our prosperity was pulled out from under us. We saw what happens when we rely too heavily on a single industry, just as Florida saw with its housing collapse and Michigan saw after the auto industry's failure.

Never has it been clearer to us that the path to prosperity and a sustainable economy is not singular but diverse. Yes, we want to help get the construction sector back on its feet, but at the same time we want to attract employers who will diversify our base. So we are laying the foundation for a more sustainable economy.

In 2007, we provided land needed for jobs – enough land for 135,000 new jobs over the next 20 years -- in strategic areas around the County. In 2008, we started zooming in on sub-areas and setting them up for success – such as the plan for revitalizing the Highway 99 area. In 2009, we streamlined services with an eye toward better results. In 2010, we'll bring it all together, for job-creation in many sectors and to give our community healthy options.

I have learned there are three ways the County can do its part to build a more sustainable economy.

One, we need a better process that helps businesses build, clearing a path for the jobs they'll create. So we're giving businesses greater flexibility in how they can use their land. We're overhauling our zoning and development codes so businesses are able to seize a market, not miss it standing in line for their permits. And we are going outside urban area boundaries in our Rural Look to better support farms, forests, wineries, and other rural occupations that are just as important to our economy as city jobs and a huge part of what makes us unique.

The Board also is making better connections between our quality of life and economy. We have a business- and environment-friendly storm water plan. We have a new, consolidated Environmental Services department that already has begun cutting costs and creating better environmental outcomes, and a legacy lands program that is better coordinating the active management of the public's land. And we're continuing our work to create better places to play, building four new parks in 2009 and making improvements to Whipple Creek Regional Park, thanks to a joint effort with horse owners. And if money is available, this year we'll start construction on four other new parks.

Two, we need to expand partnerships across our community to create shared success. We've formed partnerships in the past, but in this economy, we need to renew our efforts. This likely will mean giving up the turf we sometimes hold so tightly. It means helping a neighbor find success while we still look for ours. And it may mean new money-sharing agreements. Areas such as Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, have shown us that when jobs and a regional revenue resource are shared, the region and all the individual jurisdictions within it benefit.

In Clark County, we've begun to forge bonds across jurisdictional boundaries to find efficiencies and opportunities. The County and city of Vancouver now jointly and more efficiently manage regional parks. Clark County, Battle Ground, Ridgefield and Clark Regional Wastewater District

formed a sewer treatment compact to share resources and save money, and other cities and Clark Public Utilities are coordinating with us. Sewers may not be a sexy subject, but they certainly are good for business development and a livable community.

Those efforts are a great start, and we will continue to work with our current partners while we find new ones. We are expanding and strengthening jurisdictional partnerships because the people we serve don't care about turf, they just want seamless, effective services. And we're strengthening partnerships because especially in this economy, it is the right thing to do with taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

While Clark County obviously is a partner in the larger metropolitan region, we can offer some things our Oregon partners can't. In the wake of Measures 66 and 67, we see opportunity, and begin today putting out the call to Oregon businesses to come across the Columbia and put down roots where many of your employees already are. It's not far, and Clark County Works.

Three, we have to literally build the path to prosperity in a road system that works for, and with, the businesses we're recruiting. As we reach for better days, we need to improve how people get from home to work and goods get to market. To do this, we need a road system that works better.

The old ways of designing and building a road system are no longer financially or environmentally sustainable. New design and construction methods are emerging, and we will lead the way in adopting them to meet our county's transportation needs. Partnerships between the private sector and state will be the new norm. We will continue to look for innovative financing options, and we will reduce project costs by adopting more flexible standards to be sure new roads are sized more appropriately to their use.

We will do an even better job of keeping pedestrians and bike-riders in mind, and safety will remain our primary focus. All this will mean greater efficiency, cost savings, a healthier population, and less of our precious land covered in asphalt.

In the process of creating a better road system, we can immediately put people to work and help lay the foundation for better economic days. The \$140 million Salmon Creek Interchange Project, which will break ground later this year, is a great example. The Washington State Department of Transportation estimates that construction alone could employ 600 people who may otherwise be jobless. And the project will fulfill a long-standing commitment to improve access to Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital, WSU Vancouver, other work sites in the neighborhood, and area residents who have been fighting 134th Street traffic for too long.

That same reasoning drives the planned \$26 million upgrades at 179th Street and I-5. Clark County will receive \$12.5 million from the State in Local Revitalization Financing to build the project that will open 627 acres earmarked for good-paying, light industrial and office jobs. This financing allows new development to pay for its public improvements over time. And the improved access will promote business at the Amphitheater and the County's Event Center at the Fairgrounds, and create potential regional shopping opportunities. Finally, it fulfills our promise to make sure there is adequate infrastructure to support growth, so current neighbors will see their quality of life enhanced instead of diminished.

And for me, the same reasoning applies to the Columbia River Crossing. After five years and thousands of hours of work on the subject, I think a Columbia River Crossing project is the most important step on the path to better days both short-term and long-term.

Notice that I said “a” CRC project, not “the” CRC project. I said “a” precisely because of those years of listening, learning, and working with our citizens and project partners. Three years ago when I delivered the State of the County speech, I called for finding better ways to move people and goods because the old ways were simply too expensive for the benefit received. Now, I am more convinced than ever. I’m also confident we’re getting there as partners, from both sides of the Columbia, in Salem, in Olympia, and in Washington, D.C. On cost alone, the CRC project has been slashed from \$6 billion estimated three years ago to a little more than half that. A good start. And as local representatives appointed by Gov. Gregoire to the CRC’s Project Sponsors Council, Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt, myself, and whomever is appointed to represent C-Tran and the public at large will continue working closely with our local boards, councils, project partners and community to protect and promote the interests of Clark County residents.

The work with our partners is definitely challenging and sometimes heated. As we develop the details, I fully expect work to get harder. This is a complex project, integrating a bridge, seven interchanges, light rail, and very different regional visions for how to best move people and goods. Putting a man on the moon was complex, but we did it in less than a decade. Here we are 15 years into the Columbia River Crossing and we haven’t even started building. The work this year is going to be tough, but we have to do it quickly, together, and right.

Based on what I’ve learned and all the work that’s been done, here’s where I think our work should lead:

- 1) We do indeed need to replace the existing I-5 bridges. Congestion and safety concerns can’t be addressed on the existing 50 and 100-year old spans because the lanes are too narrow, there are no shoulders, and the lift span clogs traffic. There’s little debate about all that.
- 2) We need a project that puts local people to work. Estimates are that 16,000 construction jobs will be created by the project and there’ll be another 9,000 jobs for project suppliers. Those jobs must go to our region’s residents. Since May 2007, we have lost 30 percent of our construction jobs in Clark County, so we have the people. I will not support bringing in workers from other areas of the country or world. And we must use domestic materials. We have steel, concrete, and carpentry forms available in our region and we must give the work to companies who either employ or are willing to employ our neighbors. I invite you to stand with me and call for a project that uses our region’s steel, concrete, and workers.
- 3) We need to redesign the inadequate interchange systems on both sides of the bridge. The short ramps, poor visibility, and inadequate space to merge help account for an accident rate twice that on similar highways in Washington and Oregon. Notice I didn’t say we should expand every interchange. To reduce project costs, keep traffic moving safely, and have a better performing project, we should be looking at options that might include removing one or more of those ramps. Until recently, that had not been considered. But through more open conversations we’re

beginning with communities on both sides of the river, we are now looking at more creative suggestions to cut costs and increase benefits.

4) We have to give people options for getting across the river other than driving their cars. To do that, first and foremost we need more jobs on this side of the Columbia. Second, we need to provide better public transit service.

To do that, the C-Tran Board of Directors is looking at a package of improvements that would give commuters the option of taking a bus from home to a light rail terminus at Clark College, from where you could take light rail to downtown Portland, Beaverton, Gresham, or the airport. This package would cost our citizens nothing to build because light rail construction costs could be covered by federal transit funds -- which will go elsewhere unless we capture them. However, it would cost a couple 10ths of a percent in sales tax to maintain that integrated system of buses and high capacity transit.

Most importantly about that cost is you, the voters, will get to decide if having fewer cars on the road to compete with, less CO2 going into our air shed, and more options for getting across the river is worth a few pennies on a purchase. To reiterate, our commitment remains that any funding request for light rail will go to the voters

5) In recent talks about a second round of federal stimulus dollars, up to \$25 billion is being identified for key infrastructure projects around the country. The federal reauthorization also may have up to \$25 billion identified for "Projects of National Significance." The Columbia River Crossing Project is both these things. We must work with our legislators and Congressional delegation to boost federal funding above the one-third share now being discussed. This is an international highway and a national freight hub that deserves to be on the nation's short list to receive targeted funding.

6) For a local contribution to a new bridge, I can only support a toll if it is low enough for Clark County working families to afford and creates a benefit that's worth it. I also believe a toll should be limited to collection on I-5 and only to repay an affordable share of the improvements. And understand: no toll should start until after the new bridge is opened, 2017 at the earliest. Finally, if a direct user fee is to be the local share of this project, I also will fight for the State of Oregon to allow our residents – who already pay more than \$150 million a year in income taxes to the State – to write the tolls off on their Oregon income tax. It's the least Oregon can do, and frankly, a relatively easy way for that state to put money into the project without shelling out as much up front.

A Columbia River Crossing project, Salmon Creek Interchange project, 179th Street Interchange project – none of these alone will solve congestion. But together, they'll help, and without them, increasing congestion, decreasing safety, and clogged commerce are virtually guaranteed.

Better process, better partnerships, better infrastructure – better government working toward better days. But what might come from our efforts to be better? I'm confident that we will get the jobs we want and need. We can bring back our manufacturing base and attract service jobs that can support families.

In fact, dating back to 1900, we've seen innovation at its best and the birth of some Northwest business icons during or just after a recession, companies such as Weyerhaeuser, Nordstrom, Alaska Airlines, Starbucks and Costco.

For us to restart the engines of manufacturing that once roared in our community, we look to create a place for innovation in the next generation of production. One example is simply an extension and adaptation of the electronics giants we've already seen flourish here – renewable energy production. Stimulus dollars, new federal and state regulations, demand for clean power, and concerns about climate change are fueling - no pun intended - that growing field. With our available land, clean water, and access to markets, Clark County is competing with places such as Tennessee and Singapore for solar and wind energy companies that could build manufacturing plants here and ship more of their products through the Port of Vancouver.

To attract these businesses, we are leveraging our competitive strengths in the larger global marketplace. We have a workforce being trained at Clark College, which opened its Tech Center campus at near capacity last fall and has construction of a science, technology, engineering and math building slated for 2013.

Workers are being trained at WSU Vancouver, where a \$43.5 million Applied Technology Classroom building is under construction and will house the only non-commercial clean-rooms in the area.

With our established electronics industry cluster, our students and local businesses can leverage existing knowledge to create new products for clean energy. Some have already realized the potential of renewable energy and begun to expand our local economy:

*In 2001, the Port of Vancouver began importing wind energy turbine components from a Danish company. Now, the port has long-term contracts with four leading wind turbine manufacturers and is receiving components from 10 different countries, and huge investments at the Port are making room for more. Unloading turbine components alone has generated more than 150,000 longshoremen labor hours in the past three years.

* Columbia Energy Partners, a wind farm development company formed in 2001, now employs five people in downtown Vancouver. Developing wind and solar projects costs millions of dollars and requires a wide array of technical expertise, from attorneys to meteorologists.

* Look at Christensen Shipyards. In October 2008 as the market for luxury yachts - and many other things - was fading rapidly, the owners saw wind turbine blades being trucked past their Southeast Columbia Way plant, and the light went on. The blades are large, composite structures, just like the yachts they build, and they thought if they could build one, why couldn't they build the other. So after doing their homework, the owners formed Renewable Energy Composite Solutions. Now the company has a \$1 million state grant – federal stimulus money – and is working with a Beaverton company to manufacture the blades and some metal parts of small wind turbines. That deal has the potential to create 100 temporary jobs as Christensen retools and then 100 permanent jobs as production begins at the shipyard. And the company is one of four partners on a team led by SAIC, a Fortune 500 company, that is working to design and build the

country's first wave energy test berth. Construction of the ocean test platform could start at the Christensen site in early 2011.

*Last July, the International Air and Hospitality Academy in Vancouver opened a new division called Northwest Renewable Energy Institute, which may be the only independent, accredited program in the country that focuses strictly on wind turbine technician careers. The first class of 40 graduated in December and those people are on their way to gainful employment. With Washington now ranked fourth in the nation for existing wind energy capacity, we're hopeful many of those jobs will stay here.

*And there is SunEnergy Power International, the Washougal nonprofit whose co-founder and CEO, Walt Ratterman, is missing in Haiti. He was there helping bring solar power to rural health clinics. Walt and his family are in our prayers.

*Your Board of Commissioners also is capitalizing on these growing opportunities by developing a proposal to use forest-clogging slash as a fuel source at a potential biomass generation facility that would create not only power but jobs. And we are exploring how we can work with private companies to turn our garbage into energy, cleaning up an old landfill in the process.

Another sector with opportunities is services. Not service jobs as you may think of them, but consider, for example, the great addition to our community of Fisher Investments, a leader in financial management. Not only will Fisher provide enhanced financial services here, but it could bring jobs. We will continue to support the company in any way possible as it takes steps to relocate its California headquarters to Camas.

Medical services also are growing. Even though one of our top two employers is a medical center, many of us have had to cross the river to see specialists or wait weeks to see a primary care physician here. Some health care organizations understand that, are growing their investment in Clark County, and bringing good-paying jobs with them.

Southwest Washington Medical Center is building a \$26 million multi-use clinic in east county that could open in summer 2011 and provide 134 full-time positions. Providence Health & Services will break ground next month on the \$6.5 million Camas Medical Plaza in east county. And Legacy Health System, which opened its \$285 million hospital in Salmon Creek only four and a half years ago, plans to open its seventh clinic in 2012-2013.

We are thrilled with this expansion of health care services and that Fisher Investments has chosen to come to Clark County. We will work harder to help them be successful. But we must remember that even if not all employers want to set up shop in our jurisdiction, if we can keep them in the region, we all will benefit.

A revitalized, diversified and sustainable economy. Jobs. Greater local and regional cooperation. A greener government. We have our work cut out for us. But better days are ahead. We must focus on our priorities to better serve the public. Stay focused, but never without the big picture in mind for the sake of our children and grandchildren. We must be realistic when

we decide what we can do today and in the future. Realistic, but never without creativity and hope.

Now, I don't know how many Bruce Springsteen fans there are out there in the audience, but I can't think of anybody in popular culture who better brings the lives of hard-working men and women and tough economic times into harmony.

In 1992, Springsteen wrote a song that talked about renewed hope, the light at the end of the tunnel. It's called "Better Days," and it ends something like this: "Every fool's got a reason for feelin' sorry for himself, And turning his heart to stone. Tonight this fool's halfway to heaven...And I feel like I'm coming home. These are better days, baby. These are better days, it's true. These are better days, Better days are shining through."

Thank you for being here today, and for all you do every day in our community to reach for better days. God Bless you.

**State of the County
February 4, 2010**

**Billy Henry
Northwest Association for Blind Athletes**

Hello everyone, my name is Billy Henry. Thank you, Commissioner Stuart, for this opportunity. I live here in Clark County with my family and I am currently a senior at Hudson's Bay High School.

I have been visually impaired since birth, but yet, I see well enough to know that blind and visually impaired individuals are not being provided the same opportunities as their sighted peers to participate in sports and stay physically active.

Through athletics, everyone is provided an excellent avenue to increase their confidence, physical fitness and the inspiration to succeed in other areas of life.

The current unemployment rate for the visually impaired runs at 75% and I am certain that the need to enhance self esteem for these people is very real and greatly needed.

In 2007, I teamed up with my friend Nick Wilks, who is also visually impaired. We decided that we should try to make a difference in the lives of visually impaired people through sports and physical fitness.

To achieve our dream we started the Northwest Association for Blind Athletes in May of 2007.

Our vision for the association is to offer athletic opportunities to all blind and visually impaired athletes in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

The process of building our organization has been a very challenging journey. We have had to learn how to develop a non-profit organization, how to raise funds, how to recruit board members and how to market our mission.

Despite the difficulties we have faced, we have been blessed to have accomplished many great things...

The highlights of our first few years include:

- Providing sports equipment for blind students in Montana.
- Hosting a conference for blind youth at the Vancouver Hilton.
- We have taken our power lifting team to meets in Washington, Oregon, Nevada and California and been very successful in competitions.

This year we will be hosting a goal ball (explain what goal ball is) camp in Salem and a judo camp in Spokane.

Perhaps our greatest accomplishment of all was receiving our official 501 C 3 status from the Internal Revenue Service.

For those of you in the audience who have had to deal with the IRS, you will understand what I mean when I say that working with the IRS can be very challenging, to say the least.

I know that all of us are faced with a number of very difficult circumstances to overcome. My thought for all of you is to offer up the belief that if you really stay focused and keep committed to what you are doing, you can achieve great things, no matter how steep the climb.

The current economic times that are upon us have provided many challenges for everyone. I am well aware of how tough the economic times are. Trying to raise money in this economy is no easy task, but that does not deter me from our mission.

And speaking of that, I would like to close by extending an invitation to all of you to attend our auction and dinner on March 5th at the Firstenburg Center. You can purchase tickets and learn more about our organization by going to our web site www.nwaba.org

Thanks very much to all of you for this opportunity and I look forward to seeing all of you at the NWABA auction on March 5th.