

## Economic development campaign taking greater hold



Photo by [Troy Wayrynen](#)

Ron Arp, president of Amplify Group Inc. of Brush Prairie, and Ginger Metcalf, executive director of Identity Clark County, are spearheading the “Land Here, Live Here” branding campaign.

By [Gordon Oliver](#)

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Ron Arp, President of Amplify Group Inc. of Brush Prairie



Ginger Metcalf, Executive director of Identity Clark County



When a group of Clark County business boosters launched a low-budget branding campaign last summer, they didn't know whether their "Land Here, Live Here" theme would take off in the larger Portland region. They hadn't noticed the hidden meaning that captured the imagination of Susan Bladholm.

Bladholm, marketing vice president for the Greenlight Greater Portland business group, hatched the idea of flying corporate leaders to Pearson Field and other area airports for a business recruitment weekend. Perhaps giving leaders a view of the region's attributes would translate into decisions that would create new jobs.

It's not exactly what the campaign's originators had in mind, but they're happy to take it.

"Land Here, Live Here" aims to lure companies to move to the Vancouver-Portland metro area and grow here. The campaign was hatched with almost no budget by a handful of local business boosters but has since gained support from many of the leading economic boosters on both sides of the Columbia River, blossoming into a bistate regional effort.

The slogan was intended to have a double meaning, with "land" referring to the existence of available industrial land for businesses to build on, and also to the idea that they should arrive, or "land," in the greater Vancouver-Portland area.

Bladholm's insight added a third meaning to the phrase — and also another tool to recruit business. Corporate leaders will land at area airports in mid-September to check out metro-area opportunities.

"The whole 'Land Here' aspect speaks to flying," said Bladholm, who is engaged to a pilot.

"I've never seen anything like this before," said Ginger Metcalf, executive director of Identity Clark County, a private economic development organization. "Originally, we set out to do this just in Vancouver and Clark County, but it didn't take us long to recognize we are part and parcel of a larger partnership."

It's certainly unusual for business and economic development ideas from Clark County to cross the great Columbia River divide. On the Oregon side, this county is often seen as plotting to woo businesses with its relatively favorable tax structure — a notion that's at odds with the reality of the county's 13.1 percent unemployment rate.

## Connecting name, place

On this side of the Columbia, there's a historical tendency to focus on differences — culturally, politically and economically — between Clark County and the rest of the Portland region. Yet every day, the two bridges linking Portland and Vancouver are packed with the estimated 60,000 commuters who live here and work in Oregon.

The branding campaign's headline "Portland-Vancouver USA" acknowledges that Portland is the region's central city and distinguishes Vancouver from its giant Canadian neighbor to the north. The approach of putting Portland's name first ruffled some local feathers, but economic development advocates say it reduces the awkward meet-and-greet conversations cluttered with confusion over place names.

"When people ask where you're from and you say 'Vancouver,' they think Canada," said Brent Grening, the Port of Ridgefield's executive director and one of the originators of the "Live Here, Land Here" campaign. "With Portland, they think Portland, Maine. It just goes on and on."

The image of Mount Hood takes advantage of its obvious importance to the region's sense of identity, said Patrick Hildreth, owner and designer of Tribe 2 Graphic Design in Vancouver, which created the logo. "It represents strength, history, and upward momentum."

The curved lines running through the mountain are meant to represent the Columbia as a river that unifies the region's history, culture and economy, he said.

The marketing campaign is flexible, allowing local communities to attach their messages to the larger regional theme. That has proven popular on the region's periphery, in communities that cannot afford high-quality promotions.

The Port of Ridgefield now has "Land in Ridgefield, Live in Ridgefield" handouts that focus on the availability of land for development and its shipping port, as well as its good schools and proximity to the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, schools and Tri-Mountain Golf Course. It describes Ridgefield as being "on the northern edge of Portland-Vancouver USA."

"You cannot market yourself as a small community," Grening said. "You're just kind of lost."

## Adding to buzz

The two-pronged regional and local promotion also appeals to Tom Nelson, economic development manager for the city of Sherwood, Ore., a town on the southwest edge of the Portland region that has become a partner in the campaign. While individual communities or subregions undoubtedly will want to continue their own branding efforts, "if we were to all adopt 'Land Here, Live Here,' it would be a buzz to go along with the other buzz," he said.

"I think it's a great regional presence," he added.

As to whether other communities will embrace the campaign, "I think if they will get past their awkwardness about it being from Vancouver, we can just move on," Nelson said.

The project's biggest champion, Brush Prairie communications consultant Ron Arp, is among the most measured in assessing the branding campaign's prospects to take the region by storm.

"What I think in all reality this will be one of a few regional brands," said Arp, president of Amplify Group Inc. "I don't want to give the impression Portland will adopt this lock, stock and barrel. I see it as a long burn before people say this is a brand we want to use for our region."

### **'Sweat equity'**

The current strategy is for businesses, governments and civic organizations to pay a \$199 fee to use the slogan with its logo on their business materials and cards. So far, about 40 organizations have bought into the campaign, Arp said.

The "Land Here, Live Here" campaign has been an almost all-volunteer effort, and Arp estimates the value of donated time and materials at about \$350,000. The \$10,000 to \$15,000 spent so far has come from private seed money raised by Identity Clark County and through the \$199 fee, Arp said.

"This one is a lot of sweat equity," he said. "It will be run by the business community and helped by the public sector, rather than the other way around."

But even with those warnings of diminished expectations, the initiative seems to be generating serious enthusiasm within the economic development community. Regional Partners, a nonprofit economic development consortium that includes representatives from Vancouver and Clark County, has embraced the branding campaign, said Pam Treece, the consortium's executive director.

"This is one of the few times I've seen such a high degree of cooperation across the two states, and it's wonderful to see," Treece said. "The branding effort is just part of both the public and private sectors coming together to work more efficiently.

"It's a perfect storm, although in this case you could say it's a perfect rainbow."