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Not long after Dan and Diane Roberts first met, they quickly discovered a commonality beyond working at the same hospital in southern Oregon: both were raising teenagers. Eleven years ago, Dan, now a retired physician, and Diane, a retired registered nurse, relocated to Kalama.

As supporters of Northwest Innovation Works' methanol plant in Kalama, the Roberts see the project as a springboard to new jobs and increased tax revenue. A much-needed new middle school could also be funded with tax revenue generated by the clean-tech facility, they point out. And in turn, more spending on public education could make the city, and Cowlitz County as a whole, more attractive to the kinds of residents and services a growing community needs.

With the fishing and timber industries no longer able to sustain the city, Dan and Diana say they're impressed with Northwest Innovation Works' plans for a vocational-training partnership at Lower Columbia College.

"This would allow the community to grow and if things don't grow, a small town or anything else, if there's not some growth, it really dies," says Dan. "The people that have lived here know that the fishing industry, which was huge a hundred years ago, is never going to come back."

"I think it's very important to have industry that helps support family-wage jobs in our community, because otherwise, the community can't grow and sustain itself," Dan added. "Again, we have the ideal natural resources to drive that. We have inexpensive energy, we have access to inexpensive natural gas and electricity, and we have transportation by port, by water, by rail and by freeway. We have a willing and talented workforce."

"We need to attract industry back to our county," said Dan. "And yet we get push back from opponents when we try to do this. Everybody is using products every day that are created from methanol. Toothbrushes, televisions, toilet seats, carpet, airliners—even the interior of Priuses are methanol. It's pretty disingenuous to oppose a plant that produces something that we all use."

"I worry that if this doesn't go through we have sent a chilling message to industry that the Northwest is closed for business because this is a responsible project that's well-funded, has environmentally friendly approach to the business, and if we can't do this here, then I'm not sure we can do any industrial development anywhere in the Northwest."