



New Jobs Will be Transformational for the Community

Kelso resident Becky Phillips has called Cowlitz County home for all but a few years of her life, including an active childhood spent immersed in 4-H programs, and watching her father, a longshoreman, load and unload timber at the Port of Longview.

Times have changed, and so have the community's fortunes. Many family-wage jobs have disappeared since Phillips, a finance manager with Housing Opportunities of Southwest Washington, left for college.

Reynolds Metals Company shut down its smelter site in 2001. In 2016, Weyerhaeuser ended its presence in Longview by selling the paper mill – after years of workforce reductions.

The lack of job prospects locally prevented Phillips from moving home after college, leading to stints in Portland and Tacoma before she could build up her career and land a job back in Kelso. It's a common experience for many of the residents she grew up with.

For that reason, Phillips and her husband are both proponents of Northwest Innovation Works' (NWIW) methanol plant in Kalama. She believes the job-creation potential is immense, and could be transformational for the community.

“It will provide jobs for the people who are making the product, working in the warehouse, office personnel and managerial positions, so you're going to be filling lots of jobs. It gives everybody a chance.”

She adds: “The timber industry is not going to come back, neither is the mill industry. So, we've got to get these other industries into this town to make it grow, make it flourish and be a great place to live.”

Phillips, a self-described environmentalist whose husband owns a Smart car, is particularly interested in the sustainability aspects of NWIW's plans, including its Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) technology.

NWIW is the first company along the Columbia River to invest in ZLD, which would recycle water used at the facility and eliminate the need for wastewater discharge.

“We've got great rivers, and the fishing is wonderful. Everybody here grew up on sturgeon,” Becky says. “I was very excited to learn about the water recycling. That was just fascinating.”