

# Larry Burtness

Technology Entrepreneur

Forks, Washington

lburtnes@u.washington.edu



Leaving behind the stress and congestion of urban life and starting over in a smaller, cleaner, friendlier place is an enduring dream for many people. Those who make the move to a rural area often discover that small town life really is the slower, less stressful lifestyle they were seeking. But some new transplants to small towns discover something else: the experience and talent they've brought along with them can open doors to new and challenging local projects – and a busier life than the one they had before.

Larry Burtness, a technology entrepreneur in Forks, Washington, is an expert in finding new opportunities in a small town. When he moved to Forks in 1997, his plan was to concentrate on moving the software development company he developed in Anacortes, to this new, rural location. Through a personal contact, he was asked to take on a project for the Quinault Tribe, transferring data from reel-to-reel tapes into a digital format. That effort led to other technology work including serving as a computer applications instructor at the Forks branch of Peninsula College. But he didn't stop there; for the past two years, Larry has been the project manager for the new Olympic Virtual Museum, a grant-funded project sponsored by the University of Washington. Larry believes the diverse skills he developed over the years as a freelance technology professional in a more urban environment were exactly what he needed to be effective in his new home. His technical expertise is the foundation, but his background in education, as an instructor and administrator, have broadened his range of opportunities. As he puts it, "People often assume that in a computer-related project, technology skills are predominant. But the ability to work with people, and to solve problems in an innovative way is equally important."

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Like many others, Larry and his wife made the move to a small town for personal reasons. His wife's parents live in Clallam Bay, and the move has made it easier for everyone to stay in touch. Larry also spent time in Forks in the late 1970s, as a basketball coach and player, and he still meets people who remember him from that time. Because of that past association with the area, he is considered a "local" by many longtime Forks residents. Larry's personal history has been helpful in various local projects, especially his latest venture, the Olympic Virtual Museum. The museum, which will be located primarily on the Internet, is designed to collect and display artifacts from North Olympic Peninsula history. It will include photos, journals, oral histories and other local treasures and will allow visitors to view and hear them interactively online. Most of the work to this point has been locating and gathering rare documents and photos from local residents. Larry believes his history in Forks has helped with the sensitive process of asking for the use of precious personal items. He says, "They know that I'm not coming from outside and telling them about their history. There is a really good connection there, and I think that's been an important piece of this process." Larry's expertise in transferring a variety of media – written documents, audio tapes and graphic images - into a digital format has helped streamlined the process considerably.

In addition to continuing to develop and expand the museum, Larry has started work on another project. He's collaborating with his brother, who lives in California, on a business that will provide marketing services throughout the West Coast. He feels it has enormous potential and is looking forward to whatever comes next.