



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Our Valley What's Next heads to North Carolina in search of big prize**

WENATCHEE — An Our Valley What's Next delegation will head to Durham, N.C., early next week to pitch the community's revitalization plan at the America's Best Communities competition.

Wenatchee/East Wenatchee is one of 15 semifinalists in the national competition, which recognizes communities across the United States that are developing solutions to transform themselves. Judges will select eight finalists on Wednesday. Those eight communities will each receive a \$100,000 grant to begin executing their revitalization strategies.

After one year of implementing their plans, three communities will be named grand-prize winners, with \$3 million awarded to the first-place community, \$2 million for second place and \$1 million for third.

Delivering the presentation for Our Valley What's Next will be Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce executive director Shiloh Schauer, one of the founders of Our Valley. Schauer will have 15 minutes to convince the judges that Our Valley should be selected a finalist.

The Our Valley pitch as well as those from the other 14 communities will occur on Wednesday, beginning at 6 a.m. PDT with the first nine pitches, followed by the final six pitches at 9:45 a.m. PDT. The order of presentations will be determined the day before. For live updates, visit the ABC Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/AmericasBestCommunities/>. The eight finalists will be announced at 1:45 p.m. PDT Wednesday. The competition is sponsored by Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank, and The Weather Channel.

"It's a great opportunity to tell our story and to promote the Wenatchee Valley as well as the rest of the Pacific Northwest," Schauer said. "It's also a great opportunity to learn

from the other 14 communities, to network and to look at resources that are out there. We don't know what we don't know.”

“We hope to showcase our vision of a place that generates hope and prosperity for residents,” said Alan Walker, executive director of the United Way of Chelan and Douglas Counties, the fiscal sponsor of Our Valley. “We have a rich history of being risk-takers who come up with forward-thinking ideas and concepts — some deemed impossible at the time but now taken for granted. Our vision is to nurture the next generation of innovators, to create an environment of hope for each person, that prosperity is possible, that dreams can become truths. We believe the best approach to achieve that vision is one of inclusiveness, of working together, of supporting each other to create a better future.”

Besides Schauer and Walker, others representing the community in Durham, N.C., will be Allison Williams, executive services director for the City of Wenatchee; Lori Barnett, community development director for the City of East Wenatchee; and Lisa Parks, executive director of the Port of Douglas County.

Community leaders have pledged that Our Valley What's Next will continue regardless of how it fares in the ABC competition. The presentation in North Carolina comes as Our Valley is in the middle of Phase II of its community planning initiative, which is meant to guide the community's growth over the next 15 to 20 years. It is believed to be the first time a planning effort has been undertaken across multiple jurisdictional boundaries in the area. The name, Our Valley, was intentionally chosen to reflect this approach.

Since late February, six teams made up of about 100 residents have been meeting to vet and develop action items and big projects that address the local economy, education, health care, public safety, arts and culture, diversity, land use, transportation and the environment.

These projects are serving as the underpinnings of Our Valley's community revitalization plan and will be “owned” by local governments, the business community, nonprofits and community organizations.

OVWN traces its beginning to discussions held by a local economic development roundtable in early 2014, followed by a TEDx conference in Wenatchee that focused on multi-jurisdictional planning and action. The effort today is overseen by a steering committee that includes Shauer; Walker; Williams; Barnett; Parks; Stacy Luckensmeyer, director for the Center of Entrepreneurship and Continuing Education at Wenatchee Valley College; Gustavo Montoya, editor of El Mundo; Norma Gallegos of Hand In Hand Immigration Services; Steve King, City of Wenatchee community and economic development director; East Wenatchee resident Shayne Magdoff; Wenatchee resident Sara Rolfs; and Gil Sparks of the Community Foundation of NCW.

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