



BELLINGHAM REGIONAL
**CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

Still Worth Believing In

The Fourth of July has always carried a mix of celebration and reflection.

There are the familiar traditions: flags waving, kids with glow sticks (or green **Peoples Bank** light sabers if you were at Zuanich), lawn chairs set up early, music in the air, and families gathering with friends and neighbors. Here in Bellingham, we are proud to coordinate the **Peoples Fourth of July Spectacular**, our community fireworks celebration, and every year it serves as a reminder that these moments still matter.

Not because everything is perfect.

Not because everyone in the crowd agrees on politics, policy, candidates, or the direction of the country or community.

But because, for one evening, people from across our community gather under the same sky. We look up together. We cheer together. We share in something that feels bigger than the arguments of the day.

That matters. And in this particular moment, maybe it matters even more.

For many people, patriotism feels complicated right now. There is frustration with national politics, exhaustion from division, disappointment in institutions, and anger at extremism, cruelty, and hypocrisy. **Too many conversations have become more about winning than understanding.**

I understand that. Many of us do.

But we make a mistake when we allow patriotism to belong only to a political party, a campaign slogan, or the loudest voices on the edges.

Patriotism, at its best, is not blind loyalty to a politician or party. It is a stubborn commitment to the people, places, and principles we are responsible for carrying forward.

It is possible to be concerned about the state of our country and still love it. It is possible to disagree deeply with elected leaders at all levels and still believe in the promise of America. It is possible to reject extremism, from any direction, and still choose hope over cynicism.

From where I sit, the most meaningful expression of patriotism is often local.

It looks like the small business owner turning on the lights in the morning, even when costs are up and customers are stretched. It looks like the employer taking a chance on a new hire. It looks like the volunteer showing up early and staying late so a community event can happen.

It looks like neighbors supporting local shops, families gathering downtown, nonprofits filling gaps, public servants doing difficult work, and people choosing to invest their time, money, and energy in the place they call home.

That is patriotism too.

And it is still worth believing in.

As a Chamber, we spend a lot of time talking about the realities that shape our local economy: workforce challenges, housing, permitting, public safety, taxes, infrastructure, and the rising cost of doing business. Those issues matter. They affect whether businesses can grow, whether families can stay here, and whether our community remains a place of opportunity.

But underneath all of that is something even more basic: do we still believe we are responsible for one another?

Do we still believe our community is worth the effort?

Do we still believe disagreement does not have to become contempt?

That last question feels especially important right now.

We live in a time when outrage moves quickly. Accountability matters. Standards matter. Hate, cruelty, and dehumanization should be rejected clearly.

But a healthy community requires more than outrage and shaming.

We should be able to call out what is wrong without losing our own sense of decency. We should be able to hold people accountable without turning every failure into a public execution. We should be able to defend our values without forgetting that behind businesses, organizations, and institutions are human beings — employees, owners,

customers, families, and neighbors.

That does not mean ignoring harm. ***It means remembering that repair is harder than rage, and usually more necessary.***

The “sane center,” as I think of it, is not passive. It is not indifferent. It is not a refusal to take a stand.

It is the place where we can say two things at once: we expect better, and we refuse to give up on each other.

That is the kind of patriotism I want to hold onto.

A patriotism that believes our country is more than its current political moment. A patriotism that believes our community is more than its worst day. A patriotism that understands freedom comes with responsibility, opportunity requires participation, and hope is not a feeling we wait for but a choice we practice.

After the fireworks fade and the holiday weekend ends, the real work remains. We still have businesses to support, problems to solve, neighbors to care for, and a future to build.

That work is not always easy. Some days it is discouraging. Some days it feels like we are taking one step forward and two steps back.

But then there are nights when thousands of people gather along the waterfront, in parks, on porches, and in parking lots to watch the sky light up. For a few moments, we are reminded that connection is still possible. Shared joy is still possible. Community is still possible.

And maybe that is enough to keep going.

America is still worth believing in ... not because it is perfect, not because its leaders always get it right, and not because we agree on everything.

It is worth believing in because the work of making it better still belongs to us.

And that work starts close to home.

Guy