

# Port Orchard Community Co-op Concept

## Moving Forward

Lillies Coleman knows from personal experience, if it were not for her Port Orchard area community, she might be homeless right now.

The People's Exchange in West Bremerton gave Coleman a safe space and resource center.

Coleman, age 25, reconnected with Port Orchard native Paul Fontenot who met her as students at the University of Hawaii-Hilo in 2019. Fontenot, now 28, is a history major and Coleman, a political science major. Both are currently pursuing teaching careers and hope to find positions in the Port Orchard community.

Coleman is a substitute teacher with the South Kitsap School District. Fontenot, a SK High School graduate, is a student teacher.

Members of the South Kitsap Indivisible group joined after the Labor Day Protest last September and are actively involved.

Both are committed to starting a non-profit cooperative in Port Orchard. A name for the cooperative has yet to be determined.

Their vision of a community gathering space is gaining traction.

Finding a venue is the first step. Currently, they are communicating with the managers of the downtown Polaris Theatre on Bay Street. The open alley space is a possible start-up site.

"The whole idea is to keep the wealth of the community within the community," Fontenot explained.

"Ultimately, people need resources, especially basic needs of survival or ways to be able to live their lives properly.

"If people are giving that money to an external company or big corporations, that's money leaving our community to feed billionaires," Fontenot added. "If money stays in the community in local pockets, it's good for the community."

Coleman and Fontenot believe they can use canopies for cover in this open space and eventually move the cooperative indoors.

"It would give us a space," Coleman said. "Our goal is to meet twice a month on Saturdays. The biggest need (next) is financial means to bring food for hot meals."



SKI members Lillies Coleman (left) and Paul Fontenot (right) are working on a Port Orchard Co-op start up.

In addition to meals, they envision spending time sharing extra produce or garden seeds, swapping clothes/recycling household items, sewing/mending, arts/crafts, exploring job resources/resume help and storytelling.

Community networking could provide resources for mechanical skills/road assistance or transport to medical appointments/laundry mats.

“Share with each other and receive in return, so if one of us gets stopped by ICE we can SOS and people will show up,” Coleman said.

“Building community and sense of belonging,” Coleman added. “Not paying to fix something but relying on each other. Often, people are struggling to afford to pay rent or electricity or eat food. Twice a month, this could be a stable resource.”

For more information on this start-up project or to get involved, contact Coleman at 360-953-7926.