



# Asmundson, Bellingham Have Grown Up Together

by Cynthia Scanlon

While most kids dream about becoming astronauts or baseball players, Mark Asmundson, '80, dreamed of working in government.

It was an unusual calling for a five-year-old, but when city crews installed a sewer system in his neighborhood, he watched fascinated with the complexity of the work. "I became friends with the crew, and my neighbor was a firefighter, so I had early contact with people working in city government," he says

Asmundson carried his fascination with government throughout his 15-year law career and into his dream job: mayor of Bellingham, Washington.

The Bellingham native has been "Mayor Mark," to what are now more than 800 city employees and nearly 75,000 residents, since 1995. He has been re-elected twice.

"I use my legal knowledge with my work every day," says Asmundson. "The thinking processes I developed in law school allow me to shift between issues of consequence and are applicable to every situation I deal with."

His legal training was critical in leading state and national efforts to address pipeline policy weaknesses after a severe 1999 pipeline accident in Bellingham. "We went to Congress and testified in front of House and Senate committees," he says. "We obtained significant revisions that have dramatically increased pipeline transmission safety throughout the country."

Under Asmundson's continued leadership, Bellingham has grown 30 percent in the past 10 years and transformed itself from a mill town with a natural resource-driven economy into a vibrant city with a strong business base, a professional workforce, updated infrastructure and an overall sense of community.

Perhaps his greatest accomplishment is the city's revitalization, particularly downtown, which now boasts a mixture of retail, permanent housing, and restaurants. Asmundson has also succeeded in getting a "Local Infrastructure Financing Tool" bill passed that will assist in the redevelopment of Bellingham's waterfront. "It's an historic bill for an historic project, and it's a big step for the state of Washington," he says.

Throughout his years as mayor, Asmundson has relied heavily on his law school training at Pacific McGeorge, which, he says, taught him how to think and prioritize. "I use my training whether I am dealing with neighborhood, finance, taxation or law enforcement issues," he says. "My legal training has been the foundation for my success."