Kristina Hudson has spent her career developing key business partnerships across the state. Today, she continues that devotion to economic expansion as executive director of OneRedmond and the Washington Interactive Network.
When Kristina Hudson graduated from the University of Washington in 1992, she envisioned putting her advertising and communications degree to use in the public relations sphere.

“My plan was to get into a small company and learn everything I could know (in public relations), then move and go to a bigger company, and then a bigger company,” Hudson remembered of her post-college plans.

It was, therefore, a fortuitous path that led the Bellevue High School graduate to instead cut her teeth in film and interactive media and alight on a 20-year career in economic development.

“I think the universe always puts you where you’re supposed to be,” Hudson said. “I’m actually really happy that I ended up in economic development.”

Though disconnected from her once-intended career, Hudson, 49, still is a communicator at heart. But today she uses those skills to tout the accomplishments of the two organizations she oversees as executive director.
The first is the Washington Interactive Network (WIN), a nonprofit Hudson founded in 2004 aimed at fostering the state’s healthy cluster of more than 400 interactive media companies. The other organization is OneRedmond, an economic-development enterprise, chamber of commerce, and public foundation all under one roof.

Boasting an advisory panel with industry veterans like Xbox creator Ed Fries, WIN’s diverse ranks include goliath Eastside game developers — Microsoft, Nintendo, Valve, Bungie, Wizards of the Coast, and ArenaNet — as well as emerging startup developers.

Through partnerships with educational institutions, business and community leaders, and the city governments, WIN has cultivated a community around interactive media companies, helping the industry grow to more than 3,000 jobs with a regional economic impact of more than $400 million.

Though Hudson founded WIN while she was working for the State of Washington, she carried the nonprofit with her to a job at Enterprise Seattle — now known as the Economic Development Council of Seattle and King County — in 2006 and, in 2014, she brought WIN under the auspices of her then-new employer, OneRedmond. This earned her the unofficial title of The Queen of Interactive Media.

“I have done significant work in that industry, and that’s a lot of people know me for,” Hudson said, laughing at the nickname.

In April 2019, Hudson was promoted to OneRedmond’s top position, and for the last year, she has been putting her stamp on the organization and the Redmond community. As she approaches the completion of her first year at the helm, 425 Business caught up with Hudson to discuss her career, the future of interactive media, and all things Redmond.

How did you first break into the interactive media realm?

I started at the State of Washington in their film office. My job was to actually recruit filmmakers to the region and to help their projects while they were here. Little did I know that was economic development; I thought I was just working in the film industry on the state side.

While I was there, I started paying attention to the Interactive media industry, or video games, and realized there needed to be an entity to support the video game industry. So, I created the Washington Interactive Network. It was an economic development effort to help support interactive entertainment in that industry.

How have you continued to work on WIN while also evolving your career?

(WIN) came with me when I got hired at Enterprise Seattle ... I was their first cluster economic development hire, and what that means is economic development is a regional effort, and it makes sense to focus on clusters that are important to your community or clusters that are existing in your community. At the same time, the county economic development organization was reframing. Instead of doing general economic development, it was trying to focus on specific areas. And since I had built the cluster around video games, I was their first hire there.

When did OneRedmond first appear on your radar?

It was around the time that I started at the King County economic development organization that OneRedmond had started coming into fruition.

What was it about the organization that appealed to you so much?

It was really interesting to me because OneRedmond was very unique in the world of economic development. It wasn’t funded by economic development dollars that were coming from the state or from the county, as most of those types of organizations do. This was funded specifically by companies in Redmond and the City of Redmond to do some very particular things that were needed in the economy for the city and the Eastside. As you know, we are the economic development arm on behalf of the region, as well as the Redmond community’s chamber of commerce. And we also manage the community foundation.

What is the purpose of combining these three things?

OneRedmond is an alliance of business, government, education, and community. And our mission is to connect commerce to community and to support the City of Redmond’s businesses, our workforce, our citizens, and now the greater Eastside region through our partnership in the Innovation Triangle — a partnership between the cities of Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland.

You started at OneRedmond as the vice president of business expansion before being promoted to executive director last April. What has been your focus since?

I’ve been not only trying to put my own stamp on OneRedmond, but it’s also about bringing OneRedmond to a regional focus. From its inception, it was always the plan to elevate our economic development efforts regionally. We’re doing that now and have been for the last year.

What areas of economic development have been paramount for OneRedmond going forward?

The Eastside is a powerhouse economy; but for years we have not received the appropriate distribution of resources. So, affordable housing, transportation, and education are three immediate problem areas that need to be addressed by the Eastside, and we need to be doing that with a united voice.

Let’s break that down. How does affordable housing tie into economic development?

We are in a deep, deep hole (when it comes to housing) and need to be regionally organized to course correct. Microsoft has committed over hundreds of millions of dollars to this issue; I
We all know traffic in the region is worsening daily — this has got to be, in part, due to having to travel farther away for affordable housing, right?

Yes. The Eastside is facing longer commutes and horrific traffic. Every year, a larger percentage of our local workforce is choosing to live in more-affordable areas in our state. So existing funding that is out there for transportation needs to be executed in a timely manner due to the passing of I-976; we need to have a unified voice to ensure that our Eastside needs will be met as state resources are being allocated.

Let’s explore that third point about education. Connecting education to industry is critical when we are looking at building our workforce. Talent is the No. 1 reason that we have all these companies here, especially in technology. However, we can’t produce enough (of that talent) to take those jobs. So, companies need to hire people from outside our region to come in, which then increases the population, which increases traffic, which then increases the housing prices. We need to ensure that we are getting as many of our citizens and our residents into these programs to be able to get the first shot at those jobs, because they already live here, and that helps the whole economy.

It seems like education is really what starts things, and the rest cascades from there. What work has OneRedmond been doing to move the needle forward on this issue?
We already have the Lake Washington Institute of Technology, as well as Cascadia College, on our board. DigiPen Institute of Technology also is a strong partner. And in a lot of the workforce development projects that I have worked on over the last year, we have worked with a number of community and technical colleges, as well as our four-year-degree-granting...
Institutions. It’s critical that industry and education are connected because industry moves so fast, and it’s hard for education to keep up.

With things like the OneEastside Partnership and the Innovation Triangle, it seems like so much of what OneRedmond does isn’t just about Redmond, but the Eastside as a whole, right? When I talk about the OneEastside Partnership, I’m talking about a partnership with all the organizations that want all the same things. My mission is to gather everyone together to ensure that we all are on the same page and we can get what needs to be done, done. ... And the Innovation Triangle: This is an effort to brand the Eastside as a hub of innovation and technology to the world. We all know what great things are happening here, but someone in Japan might not know that Bellevue, Redmond, and Kirkland have some of the biggest companies in the world, making us a hub of innovation.

As your first year as executive director comes to a close, what are you most proud of so far? I’m proud of the way that we’ve been communicating the work that we’ve been doing. I think that before I arrived here, we were Redmond’s best-kept secret or the Eastside’s best-kept secret. We were doing great work, but hardly anyone knew about it. That is the first thing I noticed when I started looking at what we were doing to tell our story, and it was the first thing I changed. I intentionally pivoted resources and focus to our communication. Because you can do all of the great things in the world, and your board might know about it and your members might know about it, but the world doesn’t know about it unless you talk about it. We are so proud to be the home of all these genuinely pioneering companies — they are creating the technology now that will positively impact Redmond and Washington state, if not the entire world. And that is the message that we want to continue to talk about for Redmond and the Eastside; that we are the home of innovation, of technology, that can change the world.

What is next for OneRedmond? We work to retain and grow our local businesses of all sizes by connecting them to what they need. For example, we have a lot of businesses that are being dislocated due to redevelopment from the light rail coming in. In the next year, we are working on connecting those businesses to resources and information, or actually assisting with specific business issues that they may have, trying to make sure that these companies have the best resources that we can offer them to get where they need to go.

We also will assist new companies that are interested in locating in Redmond with their business needs. For example, we had an international delegation of more than 20 companies coming through recently and we brought them speakers, we brought them on tours, and it was a really great trip. I think we might actually land some companies here in our region as a result, which would be really exciting.

At the end of the day, we want people to live here, love working here, and to want to raise their families here.

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