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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Olympic College Recruits Mason County Musician To Build Research-Based Community Music Program at Shelton Campus

Matthew Blegen, founder of Anna's Bay Chorale and 2012 Shelton Mason Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year, to lead development of Olympic Community Chorale, Youth Chorale, Youth Orchestra and more.

Shelton, Wash. – June 24, 2015 – Olympic College is partnering with the founder of the Anna's Bay Chorale to develop a suite of community music programs designed to enrich Mason County's economy and educational environment. Former Shelton Mason Chamber Citizen of the Year Matthew Blegen has spent the majority of the last three years at the University of Washington working on his Doctor of Musical Arts by studying innovative community music programs around the world and their economic and educational impacts.

"Research sponsored in 2009 by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation suggested that the communities with the highest levels of resilience to the economic crisis were also those with the highest levels of participatory arts activity, especially choirs," explained Blegen. "While this made an enormous amount of sense to me instinctively, I wanted to understand the exact mechanisms that lead from community engagement through singing to measurable economic benefit. It turns out, the key to this economic vitality is in the participatory aspects that bring together normally distinct segments of the community in collaboration and fellowship."

As an adjunct professor of music in Shelton, Blegen will be partnering with both administrators and local business stakeholders to apply this research and build on his previous work in Mason County. While coursework in music history, theory and appreciation are currently in discussion, central to this work will be a range of community ensembles designed to enhance cultural tourism in the off-season and facilitate business development.

Olympic Community Chorale to perform Handel, Fauré, Billy Joel and Broadway

Launching formally with the fall term, the new, unauditioned Olympic Community Chorale will perform Handel's masterwork *Dixit Dominus* in both Shelton and Bremerton this November accompanied by members of the Olympia, Bremerton and Tacoma Symphony Orchestras. However, preparation for this and planned March 2016 performances of the Fauré *Requiem* will begin much sooner, on Tuesday, July 7 at the new Transit-Community Center downtown. This special summer "Choir TuneUP" will focus on the development of key choral skills, including intonation, breath support, ensemble, and more, which participants can take back to their home church or choirs, or apply within the new Olympic Community Chorale. Registration for this initial course is currently open at the Olympic College Continuing Education web site, and the fee for the 8-week course is \$105 per registrant and includes all required music.

In addition to the November concerts, participants in the fall term will also prepare holiday repertoire in collaboration with the Bremerton Symphony Brass Quintet for community performances at holiday celebrations and tree lightings in both Mason and Kitsap counties.

January of 2016 will see the launch of the Olympic Youth Chorale which will prepare and perform a program of new music by 21st century composers Imant Ramish and Jake Runestad, as well as collaborating with the Community Chorale in performances of the Fauré *Requiem*. In the spring of 2016, the Olympic Community Chorale will explore the classical and 60s rock roots of the music of Billy Joel, and present a retrospective of his work before diving into preparation for late July performances of the hit Broadway musical *Les Misérables*.

Blegen thrilled to build on earlier work in Mason County.

During the eight years Blegen served as founder and general director of the Anna's Bay Center for Music, he created programming that supplemented the in-school music education at seven local schools with choral-orchestral performance experience. He also served as the artistic director of the Anna's Bay Chorale, and led the ensemble in masterwork performances throughout the South Sound region and on tour to Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York City, being named 2012 Citizen of the Year by the Shelton Mason Chamber of Commerce. At the UW, Blegen served for two years as Assistant Conductor of the American Prize-winning University of Washington Chorale, the UW School of Music's elite undergraduate ensemble.

Blegen spent the majority of the past year as Interim Executive Director of the Bremerton Symphony Association where he led the historic organization to record ticket and subscription sales. He also greatly revitalized fundraising and cash flow for the organization, and was offered a three-year contract at the same time Olympic College

reached out. "I've spent the majority of the last two years working to find a way to apply my doctoral research and make music again back home," said Blegen, a long-time resident of Union and one of the co-founders of the Union Tourism Association, as well as a member of Skookum Rotary. "So the decision was easy." Of his recent experiences in Bremerton, Blegen is particularly excited to bring the relationships and experience administrating both the full symphony and youth symphony to his new position.

"I'm thrilled to be partnering with Olympic College to build on what I and key community partners such as Green Diamond Resource Company, Bakala State Farm Insurance, Falcon Financial, Windermere Himlie and the South Sound Community Foundation had previously achieved together in Mason County."

In addition to his doctoral work, Blegen also holds a *Master of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy*, and keeps a busy performing and conducting schedule as well as an active voice studio. He also serves as Managing Director of Seattle-based vocal ensemble Choral Arts, awarded the coveted Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence in 2010; and the American Prize for Choral Performance (community division) in both 2010 and 2013. In addition to his musical career, Blegen led the small business marketing divisions for both Microsoft and Intel as the final chapter of a 20-year career in high tech marketing and public relations, and maintains enormous respect for the central role that small businesses, and small communities, play in our economy.

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