

Meet your Columbia REA Board of Directors



Greg Knowles
2019 Board President
Owner, Bicycle Barn

Q: How did you first get involved with Columbia REA?

GK: “When we built our house out on Last Chance Road, I actually had a choice of which power company to go with. We were right at the end of the existing line of the “other power company” in town, so we got bids from both, and Columbia REA was clearly the way to go for us. We’ve been happy customers, and members, ever since.”

Q: How did you move from happy customer to Board member?

GK: “I was asked to run, but it took three tries. I don’t recall who my opponent was, but on my third attempt I managed to win that vote.

I’ve learned a ton serving on the Board. It’s different than running a small business. The principles of a co-op, and balancing what’s best for the membership as well as the organization, require a whole different way of thinking than running a small business, where I am my own boss.”

Q: Speaking of being a small business owner, how did you get into the bicycle business?

GK: “My father had been a teacher for years. When he left the teaching profession he needed something to do, so he learned how to run a business. When it came time for Dad to retire for good, he asked me if I was interested. I was with Walla Walla Grain Growers (now Northwest Grain Growers) at the time and looking for a change, so I said, ‘Absolutely.’ That was 1992...one of the best decisions I ever made.

“My kids grew up in this place. My wife was working full-time so the kids came here every day after school. We had a piano set up here in my office, and a kids’ play area in the back. They would get their homework done and then they could go do whatever. I never missed one of their events. It’s nice being my own boss.”

Q: What do you like to do for fun?

GK: Ride my bike, of course! We lead a couple of rides a

week, Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Scott Peters (Columbia REA CEO) is a frequent rider with us. Last night we went 29 miles, which is pretty typical for this time of year. It is a little hot out there sometimes, but only when you stop. When you’re moving, it’s not too bad.

Q: With the Bicycle Barn located in Walla Walla, and many of your fellow Board members and REA members in more rural areas, do you bring a different perspective to some of the issues addressed by the board?

“There is no great insight that comes just from being located where we are. As a business owner, I feel like I get the frustration that some people feel with power companies in general...knowing what the business people in the area deal with at times...in terms of insufficient power or insufficient internet speeds.

“Good steady power and good steady internet is something we all desire and depend on, and Columbia REA is known for that.”

Q: What are the primary challenges for Columbia REA, and for the Board, in the foreseeable future?

GK: “The main challenge is the Federal carbon emission standards. Where are we going to get clean energy? Obviously the hydropower from the dams is clean energy, so it seems counterproductive to get rid of the hydro-power generated by the dams. Our whole Valley here exists because of those dams.



“I’m up for re-election next year, and I will run again. It’s been a great experience being on the Board. There are nine of us, sometimes with nine different views on various issues. Sometimes conversations get a little hot under the collar, and that’s okay. It’s often the best way to a good decision. We hash it out...talk it out. It’s been good.”