

Warren Buffett
Berkshire Hathaway Inc.
3555 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68131

Mr. Buffett,

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence built by Anthropic. I am writing to you on behalf of a man named Robb Deignan, who asked me to explain what he is building and why your name appears on a list of one hundred forty-seven people receiving this letter.

You are ranked one hundred thirty-nine.

The ranking is based on proximity—how close each recipient’s work, geography, or biography sits to a specific building in Tacoma, Washington. You are not close. You have never worked in Tacoma. You have no known philanthropic footprint in Pierce County. Your investment portfolio has no obvious connection to workforce development in the Pacific Northwest. You are ranked one hundred thirty-nine because you are Warren Buffett, and because a fifteen-year-old boy once put a pinball machine in a barber shop.

In 1945, you spent twenty-five dollars on a used pinball machine and placed it in Frank Erico’s barber shop in Washington, D.C. You did not build the room. You found it. Men were already sitting there, waiting for haircuts. The machine paid for itself in a week. You bought another. Within months, you had machines in barber shops across the city. You sold the business for twelve hundred dollars, bought forty acres of farmland, and spent the next sixty years demonstrating that the economics of that barber shop scale to nine hundred billion dollars.

The CrowdSmith Foundation is a 501(c)(3) building a five-station maker facility on the East Portland Avenue corridor in Tacoma, inside a federally designated Opportunity Zone. The front door is a retail tool store with free coffee. Families donate inherited tools to the Foundation and receive a tax deduction. CrowdSmith receives inventory at zero acquisition cost. Those tools are cleaned, identified, and restored—and that process is the first station of a five-station workforce training program. The restored tools go to the retail floor. Every person who walks through the door is a potential trainee, a potential inventor, a potential mentor. The tool store generates revenue, foot traffic, and community before a single grant dollar arrives. Workforce training funding, grants from a twenty-seven-source pipeline, and earned revenue from the retail operation fund the facility jointly—but the tool store is the engine, not the accelerant.

The tool store is the barber shop. The donated tools are the pinball machine. The room does the work.

Robb Deignan is sixty years old. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry and sold over ten thousand membership contracts, every one face-to-face. He never accumulated wealth. He accumulated understanding—of how working-class people decide to walk through a door, and what keeps them coming back. He developed forty-four invention concepts through a proprietary evaluation methodology called SmithScore, which assesses ideas across market viability, technical feasibility, and intellectual property strength. The pipeline that supports those inventions—from initial scoring through prototype development to funded patent filing—runs through the same five-station facility. No equity taken. No licensing rights retained. He built the entire institutional infrastructure—a thirty-eight-chapter operations binder, seven integrated financial models with over seven hundred formulas, and a twenty-seven-source grant pipeline—through hundreds of working sessions of sustained human-AI collaboration.

He was living on his own at sixteen.

If you would like to see the financial models and strategic materials that describe this project in full, they are available at crowdsmith.org/partners. An access code will be provided on request.

You told Bill Gates it was the best business you were ever in. You spent twenty-five dollars and discovered that if you put something worth paying attention to in a room where people are already sitting, the room becomes the business. Eighty-one years later, a man in Tacoma figured out the same thing with a different set of tools and a different population. The economics are identical. The room is on Portland Avenue.

Respectfully,

— *Claude*

On behalf of Robb Deignan

Founder & Executive Director
The CrowdSmith Foundation
Tacoma, Washington
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