

Small is big business

Report ranks Parksville on its business climate

By **STEVEN HEYWOOD**
NEWS EDITOR

Karen Woodburn said she had no problem opening her small business on Craig Street in Parksville.

She owns Hoochie's Coffee, Gifts and Gallery, which opened on July 30, adding she has seen a few other small businesses start up in the city's downtown core in recent months.

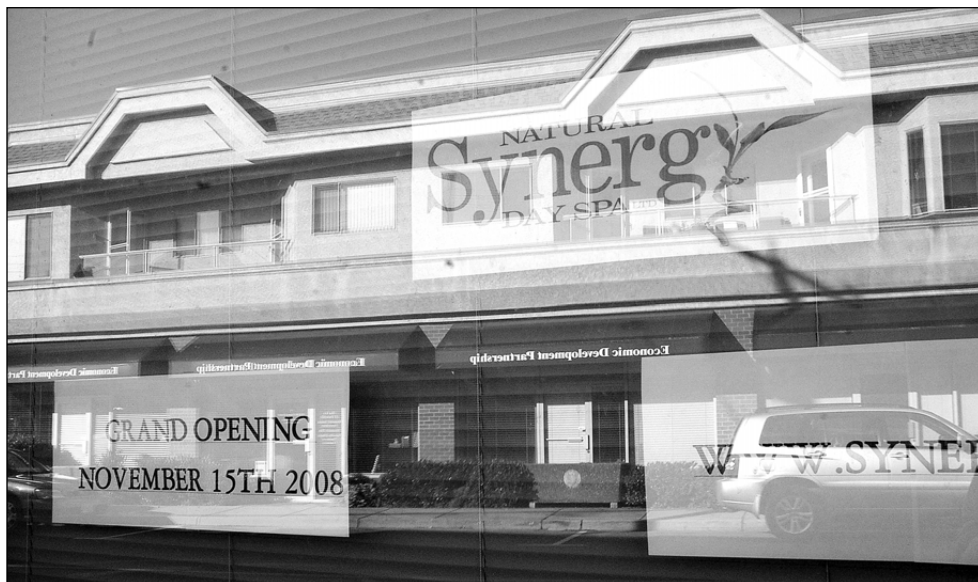
As a result, Woodburn is not surprised Parksville was, this week, ranked highly in a survey of business-friendly cities across the nation by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB).

Parksville's second-place ranking among cities whose coverage area exceeds 25,000 people — and subsequent coverage in the *Financial Times* — was a surprise and is now prompting local policy-makers into action.

"We are revamping the city's website now," said Douglas Smith, Parksville's economic development coordinator. "We are going to prominently display this theme, this CFIB result."

The CFIB report grades the cities on their presence, policies and perspective on local business and how they encourage entrepreneurs. The criteria range from business start-ups and self-employment intensity, to local government regulation and local economic performance.

Parksville scored 61.7 — good enough to come second under Alberta-Saskatchewan border city Lloydminster (73.7). In



PARKSVILLE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT office is reflected in the window of a new small business opening up across the street.

its report, CFIB notes the scores indicate all cities on a list of 11 (Parksville being one of only three B.C. cities on the list) can improve.

Smith credits Parksville's BASE program for helping rank the community so highly. That program provides potential entrepreneurs and existing businesses in trouble, with mentors and coaching to help get them off the ground. In one year, more than 30 small businesses were started through BASE. The former head business coach of the program, Mike Bourcier, is now the executive director of the Parksville and District Chamber of Commerce.

"The city is extremely gratified by the ranking," Smith said. "This is a great place to like, work and invest."

"Despite the economic gloom, I think Parksville is well-positioned to continue to be a great place to

work."

Mayor Sandy Herle said as Parksville is not a single-industry community, there are many opportunities to be successful here. With such organizations as the Parksville Downtown Business Association, economic development office, Oceanside Tourism Association and the chamber of commerce, the business climate is positive.

"Generally, we are a growing community," Herle said. "Using my own store as an example, we are doing well and I have been in business here for 18 years."

Local government policies, too, contribute to business success, said the mayor. Parksville's commercial tax rate sits at 2.6 per cent times its residential rate — significantly lower than in other cities of Parksville's size, she said.

Herle added the attention coming Parksville's way

because of the CFIB report will, hopefully, bring new investment to town.

"This really is a successful town."

Woodburn agrees, saying her business has been well-received by the community ever since she opened.

"It was a long process, getting the store ready, but the reception from everybody has been wonderful."

She added the business licensing process with the city was smooth and straightforward.

"I think (local small businesses) are great," Woodburn said. "We do rely on local stores."

Parksville is the smallest city on the CFIB list and its actual population is nowhere near the 25,000 criteria as set out in the report. The reports points out it used Census Agglomerations, which cover local economic regions, not just municipal boundaries.

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