

OCTOBER IS SMALL BUSINESS MONTH

October is small business month across Canada. As you can imagine, this is especially significant for me – both as the owner of a small business and as Mayor with a real commitment to economic development in our community.

Small businesses are a key driver of our local and provincial economies, and we want to make sure their hard-working owners are supported and have the opportunity to be as successful as possible. Did you know that small businesses employ more than a million people in B.C., which is over half of the total private sector employment in the province? The Vancouver Island Coast region has a higher proportion of small businesses per capita than any other region of the province. Small businesses were also responsible for generating one-third of our province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014, outpacing the national average by three per cent. (*Source: Small Business Highlights 2015, Small Business BC*).

You may know that the Town partnered with the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce and Ladysmith Downtown Business Association on a new business initiative called Business Walk. This was quite literally a first step – or several steps – to finding out the state of business in our community, and how our organizations can help local entrepreneurs thrive.

During Business Walk 2016, more than 30 local leaders and key community stakeholders went door-to-door surveying 94 businesses through face-to-face interviews. I really appreciated the open and honest answers to our questions, and the opportunity to hear first-hand about the state of business in our community. Our Business Walk Report will be released very soon, but here is a sneak peek – there is definitely cause for optimism in our Town. Now we need to keep the customers coming to Ladysmith, and continue working together to provide support and assistance.

Armed with the very Ladysmith-specific feedback we gathered during the Business Walk, Council will be able to make sure our economic development efforts, our tax programs and our marketing efforts are in line with small business needs. We also want to make sure that local entrepreneurs are able to take advantage of the wealth of support programs that are out there to help businesses be successful. These range from the local Community Futures organization, with advice, training and loans, to online resources such as Small Business BC, to the local Chamber of Commerce and access to the provincial and national Chamber network.

I recently opened my store for the first time ever on a Sunday . I know it will take time to build the customer base, and I hadn't done a lot of advertising or marketing – so I tried not to get too discouraged when I did less than \$100 in sales that day. It's a start, and it's always good to try new approaches, right? I also think we should be looking into more online opportunities for small businesses. The challenge, of course, is how to balance the time involved with the potential returns, and to have the patience to grow a new approach.