

HIS VIEW: Believe It Or Not, All Business Is Local

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Moscow Mayor Nancy Chaney recently delivered her State of the City address and provided a pretty optimistic outlook on our economic future. She explained that one of the consultants hired by the city seemed to think that Moscow's economy has "remained relatively stable" and that we're not facing "the boom and bust cycles" that have caused havoc around the country.

I disagree and provide you now with a partial list of businesses that were located in Moscow and have since closed their doors:

Ted's Burgers; Marco Polo Imports; Wild Women Traders; Cramer's Home Furnishings; Brown's Furniture; Mark IV Motor Inn; Waldenbooks; Creighton's; Archie's on the Square; Belle Vista; University 4 Cinemas; Lefty's; Homestyle Laundry & Dry Cleaning; Becky's Fabrics; Fiesta en Jalisco; S&P Hobbies; Gottschalks; and Rudy's Burgers.

Oh, and let's not forget Moscow's only full-line General Motors dealership, Karl Tyler Motors, which announced their plans to close up shop Friday. That is a pretty phenomenal event considering the dealership has been in business under different owners for over 40 years.

Mayor Chaney once said that Moscow was able to be "selective" about what businesses we allowed in our town.

I'm glad to see that concept is working so well for us.

During her address the Mayor also announced population growth of 3,000 residents over the course of eight years. That's equivalent to about 375 new residents per year, every year. The mayor believes that by limiting population growth Moscow can escape "rash decision making" and the undue influence of "special interests".

Overall, I think our local economic problems really lie in what we consider a "local business".

According to the "Buy Local Moscow" organization, they consider a business to be local if they are "locally-owned independent businesses that are headquartered and located in Moscow, Idaho" The group also believes that local is better because "a new chain store typically is a clone of other units" and that the "store's profits are promptly exported to corporate headquarters."

I guess by using that logic we can strengthen our local economy by not shopping at Moscow's third largest taxpayer, the Palouse Mall. Who really cares if we've got an empty big box and nearly a thousand people out of work? All those chain stores that fill the mall were only exporting their profits to the home office.

Second, no more car dealers will be allowed in Moscow because, well, they aren't a truly local business to begin with. All the name-brand dealerships are franchise operations anyway and with Karl Tyler out of business and James Toyota across the state line, we've only got two more dealers to go before Moscow is car free!

Along those same lines, since Busch Distributors isn't located in Moscow (rather across the border in Washington) and imports their fuel from outside sources, petroleum based products shouldn't be purchased either unless Steve Busch starts to drill and refine them in Moscow.

Finally, since the Moscow Food Co-Op is the only non-chain grocery store in town we'll have to drive Safeway, Winco and Rosaurus from the city limits.

Do you see what I'm getting at?

In one way or another every business is local. It must have a local manager and employees who are paid salaries which are, in turn, spent in the local economy. Many of our chain stores are owned by good corporate citizens who are consistently donating back to the community through organizations such as the United Way.

Overall, chain stores and locally owned stores both have a role in contributing to Moscow's economic vitality. The mantra in town need not be "Large corporations bad, local good". This slogan might more productively be substituted by "Any business is good business."

The sooner that concept is understood the sooner any business, local or otherwise, can grow and provide a truly broad-based and stable economy, as the mayor desires.

Henry D. Johnston is manager of an area retail store.