

HER VIEW: Mayor honored to be city's 'official greeter'

Nancy Chaney

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Columnist Henry D. Johnston delivers harsh criticism of Moscow's record of economic development ("Who should be Moscow's business greeter?", His View, Oct. 27), but his argument is a straw house of factual errors and misleading statements.

If he's trying to attract new businesses, he might try a different tack. In a new take on the old lesson, "you'll catch more flies with honey," Councilor Tom Lamar likened the approach to a restaurateur standing curbside, shouting, "we serve bad food!" and wondering where his customers are. How ironic that Johnston and his bitter associates claim to support economic development, but choose to spread false and damaging rumors instead.

Johnston distilled the mayor's role to one of greeting guests at the front door of our community. Borrowing from his analogy, I suggest the most appreciated hosts are those who have adequately prepared for their guests, anticipate their needs and make them feel welcome and valued. Ironically, Johnston seems averse to candidates who favor thoughtful planning and preparation for newcomers through fair, predictable policies, desired infrastructure and amenities.

For those who mistakenly think our economic development glass is half empty, here's news to fill it. In 2006, I was part of a team that secured a \$450,000 state grant for fiber-optic connectivity to Alturas Technology Park. In 2007, I created the new position for a grants coordinator, who brought in more than \$900,000 in 2008. In 2009, the city secured over \$1.8 million in grants for Safe Routes to School, bus shelters, public transportation, bicycle-pedestrian pathways, an industrial park master plan, Farmers Market promotion and roadway improvements - arguably the "preparation for guests" mentioned earlier.

A new economic development specialist/Urban Renewal Agency director is on board. High-wage businesses are thriving in the technology park. One firm, EMSI, rated among the prestigious Inc 500, and another, Populi, just created 12 new jobs. Biketronics, an after-market developer of motorcycle components, is outgrowing its space and is expanding. TerraGraphics, now in its 25th year, has more than 100 employees solving environmental problems around the world. Smoky Mountain Pizza, Shari's, Walgreens, New Hope Center, 2nd Chance Pawn, Main Street Lighting and the new Gambino's are among Moscow's new retail businesses.

Moscow hasn't experienced boom and bust cycles like other communities. Our economy is based on less volatile sectors of education and health care. Long-range strategic planning and responsible budgetary management contribute to our stability. Unemployment is consistently less than the state and national averages.

Johnston would have been well-advised to look for more illustrative examples of an anti-business mindset than one that was about public safety - not economic development. The prospective new business he highlighted wanted to locate on a congested corner of Jackson and Sixth streets, leading into the University of Idaho campus. The proposal involved a drive-through establishment, accessed across a busy bike lane and sidewalk. The outcome may not have been to Johnston's liking, but is an example of governmental checks and balances, involving the appeal process, public input, transparent deliberation and a vote by freely elected representatives, including a tie-breaker by the mayor. That's how our democratic process is supposed to work. It's interesting to note that the property involved is within Legacy Crossing Urban Renewal area between UI and downtown, now poised for exciting mixed-use development.

Over the past four years, I've served energetically and positively on boards of Moscow Chamber of Commerce and Latah Economic Development Council, and personally engaged state directors of commerce and labor, the governor, legislators, congressional delegates, investors, developers, city staff and the public. That approach has been complemented by mutual outreach with the university and active promotion of Palouse Knowledge Corridor as a regional economic engine.

I've worked with city councils, staff and the private sector to help Moscow shine. We can be proud of our community's welcoming image. Johnston's slights about ponytails and Birkenstocks aside, Moscow is richer for our diversity and inclusivity. I am honored to be the official greeter.

Nancy Chaney is mayor of Moscow, a small-business owner and candidate for re-election.