



Small biz makes big contribution

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Late in the 19th century, a chemistry professor from Morrin College in Quebec City was commissioned by the Government of Canada to map the rivers, mountains and passes of the Rockies (from 1872 to 1876).

One afternoon, George Mercer Dawson, for whom Dawson City was later named, was stopped by a snowstorm and took shelter in what later became the town site of Canmore.

His biographer records he awoke the next morning and was stunned by the beauty of the exquisite vistas and the veil of snow covering the highest elevations.

Three prominent peaks reminded him of a trio of pious nuns praying. Later, in Dawson's honour, they called the mountains the Three Sisters.

Dawson lived by a credo. Every morning, he rose early, thanked God he had something to do (whether he liked doing it or not, as he wryly noted in his diary) and being forced to do that work, ensured he did his best.

"That bred in me temperance, self-control, diligence, strength of will, cheerfulness and contentment -- a hundred virtues the idle would never know."

Calgary's small business owners live by a similar credo.

Daily they bring their ingenuity, integrity, passion and can-do attitude to work, doing their best to keep their companies afloat and profitable.

They have made this city Canada's small business capital.

Like the trio of limestone nuns praying near Canmore, Calgary's small business community is thankful for the global competitive advantages this city offers: A high quality of life, access to world-class amenities and a high-quality education system.

Calgary continues to attract entrepreneurs as the municipality is among the most cost-competitive in the world to launch and operate a company.

Now the city ranks second, just behind Singapore, as the globe's most business-friendly city.

Every October, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce takes one week to celebrate the considerable success of its small business community.

In fact, more than 90% of the city's 50,000 companies are small, employing fewer than 50 workers.



Other unique characteristics of our innovative entrepreneurs include:

- Many produce specialty goods that have no mass market, others manufacture components requiring detailed design and production, and 78% are service and supply companies.
- Women own and operate 35% of these enterprises.
- Small business contributes 20% to Alberta's GDP.

For the past few years, Calgary's owners have been challenged by the tight labour market, gyrating housing costs and 5% inflation.

Despite this fall's global financial turmoil, the Chamber's several thousand members preserve a quiet, yet guardedly optimistic resolution to grow or maintain their operations.

Some, who rely on the banks to fund their capital expansions, have downgraded their 2009 budgets.

Many resist the urge to downsize their workforce, having spent considerable time and money to recruit and retain their current employees.

The city, province and country have undergone recent elections. Throughout each, the Chamber encouraged politicians and voters to think about Calgary's economic restructuring and the very real human consequences of the boom-bust cycle. We believe we are better positioned than most to weather the storm.

Like George Mercer Dawson, regardless of the international gloom-and-doom, Calgary's entrepreneurs will continue to rise early, be thankful for the work they have to do and ensure they always do their best.