

A David vs. Goliath brew-haha

Java Jahn fights big names for building's cafe

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In the shadow of the Ballard Bridge, just steps from Doc Freeman's front door, customers line up four across and two deep along the counter of Java Jahn Espresso, trading small talk, waiting for their lattes.

Owner Patty Jahn, a Ballard native, greets each customer by name, sometimes pouring their favorite drink before they even reach the coffee counter. She asks about their family, reminds one man that it's his cousin's birthday and commiserates with another over a bit of bad news.



Patty Jahn, owner of Java Jahn, was told she would be able to lease a space for her espresso stand in a building to be built in the background. She now has been told the developer wants a Starbucks or Tully's.
Anthony P. Bolante/P-I

For a decade, Java Jahn Espresso has served steaming cups to the artists, attorneys, fishermen, police officers and small-business owners who frequent the simple wooden coffee stand.

At least for now.

Jahn is jittery that an unbuilt office building, planned across the parking lot from her coffee stand, will kill her business by leasing space to one of the famous-name coffee stores.

She said she was originally offered a space on the ground floor of the building to take her coffee business indoors. But recently she said she was told that the owner had changed his mind and instead wants a Starbucks or Tully's cafe on the ground floor.



"That's always advantageous," said Michael Mastro, the property developer, talking about the well-known coffee retailers. But he added that he never told Jahn she wouldn't be considered for the spot.

"That is not true at all, we haven't come to any conclusion like that at all," he said. "We have a space that is perfect for coffee, and we would definitely like to talk to her."

Al Robertson, the leasing agent for the future building, also said Java Jahn Espresso will absolutely be considered for the space.

"It would certainly fit right in if Java Jahn could go in there," said Robertson, an agent for Kidder, Mathews and Segner.



The building, Ballard Lofts, will feature a galvanized steel skin in three colors. One side will feature a black mosaic of interlocking diamond-shaped pieces of steel.

Construction of the four-story office building, known as Ballard Lofts, is scheduled to begin next week near 15th Avenue Northwest and Northwest Leary Way. The building will be in the former parking lot of the old Ernst store. Doc Freeman's marine supply took over the empty hardware store

about two years ago. The west end of the Ernst parking lot has been fenced off and left vacant since then.

But even after Ernst left three years ago, Jahn stayed, keeping an eye on the property and serving coffee to her dedicated regulars.

Tenants are expected to begin moving into Ballard Lofts a year from now. Mastro said he is hoping high-tech or Internet companies will take most of the 72,000-square-foot space.

Although no tenants have been signed yet, Robertson said he has received letters of intent from potential occupants.

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Robertson said the office building will look similar to the newly remodeled Pier 70 on Alaskan Way near downtown Seattle.

"It's really quite unique," he said.

Mastro Properties is now developing the project.

On the main floor, 2,500 square feet has been set aside food service, probably a coffee shop, Robertson said.

Jahn said Robertson told her that they were looking for a bigger name coffee retailer to fill the spot. The conversation never reached the point of talking about cost.

Jahn won't say how much her little coffee stand makes but said it wouldn't take Starbucks or Tully's much effort to figure out that she is doing well. She serves about 500 cups of coffee concoctions each day, seven days a week, along with muffins and cookies.

"We crank a lot of people through here," Jahn said. She has three employees, all college students, one full time and two part time.

Jahn uses Torrefazione Italia coffee and supplies. But it's the extras -- her knowledge of Ballard -- that keeps her customers coming back. They are decidedly loyal to Java Jahn, saying they will never step inside a competitor's store.

"What can we do to pressure this guy?" asked customer Raymond Serrono, hearing that the developer wants a coffee giant in the future building.

Joanie Parsons, owner of Parsons and Associates, a public relations firm, was also irritated that a big name might get precedence for the space over the small-business owner.

"Our whole culture, every aspect is being jeopardized by big business. These small businesses are the backbone of America. Patty is part of this community, she knows what coffee you drink and a whole lot more.

"Her customers will support her because they are also her friends," Parsons said.

Jahn refuses to be negative.

"If I survived Ernst closing, I can survive anything,." she said.

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