

New grounds for espresso business

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Patty Jahn wasn't happy with the high cost of retail space offered to her inside a new Ballard office building that overshadows her espresso cart on the sidewalk in front of Doc Freeman's.

So she's offered to pay \$1 million to buy a building across the street.

After 11 years selling coffee and pastries to Ballard's blue-collar workers, artists and business owners from her cart, the owner of Java Jahn has a place all her own.

Jahn said she is in the process of buying the building that houses Leo's Auto Clinic, across the street from Doc's on Leary Way, for \$1 million. Leo's is staying, but Jahn has already converted one of the car repair bays into a cozy shop for her coffee customers.

Jahn attracted attention last year when she and some of her customers vowed to fight any plans for a Starbucks, Tully's, or other big-name coffee shop in a planned office building a few steps away from the Java Jahn espresso cart.

The new Java Jahn opens today. But Jahn's loyal fans couldn't wait. Even while the new coffee equipment was still being installed, customers streamed in yesterday for their regular fix.

Jahn is thrilled with her shop and her new-found sense of security.

"No one has any control of me any more. I have control of my own destiny," she said. "I don't have to worry about rent increases."



Java Jahn is ready for business at its new space in the Leo's Auto Clinic building in Ballard. Dann Walker puts the last few letters in place in time for this morning's opening.
Phil H. Webber/P-I

Leo Rancour has owned the 6,500-square-foot building for about 15 years, though the business has been a Ballard fixture for twice that.

"The best part is that I don't have to walk across the street for a cup of coffee any more -- it's right here," Rancour said.

Java Jahn, which has been sound proofed and sealed to keep out the clanging and fumes from the garage, fills about 650 square feet of the building.

The shop was designed by Lagerquist and Morris architects, and built by West Homes Construction.

Over the years, Jahn, a Ballard native, has become a seemingly indispensable part of her customers' lives, offering them conversation, neighborhood news and always a bit of friendly advice along with their daily coffee.

She sells about 500 cups of various coffee concoctions throughout the day, along with pastries and sweets. In her new shop, Jahn will also offer soup, sandwiches and boxed lunches.

Jahn said she was originally offered what she considered too-pricey space in the Ballard Lofts office building, but was later told the developer had changed his mind and was courting one of the famous-name coffee retailers. Ballard Lofts is under construction in the parking lot of a former Ernst hardware store across from Jahn's old stand.

When Jahn heard in June that her espresso cart might be facing competition from a big-name coffee retailer, she started kicking up dust. Jahn said Starbucks Coffee Chairman Howard Schultz assured her -- in a televised telephone call -- Starbucks wasn't interested in the space.

A Tully's spokeswoman said they never had any plans to open a shop in the Ballard Lofts, either.

Construction on the four-story, corrugated steel office building is expected to be finished in June. The leasing agent wouldn't offer details, but said he is working on agreements with tenants for building. He denies that Java Jahn was ever rejected as a tenant; it was her decision, he said.

For her part, Jahn is looking forward to seeing the new building full of potential coffee customers.

"...It will be more business for me," she said.

She is also relishing the prospect of owning her first bit of commercial property. She already owns several residential properties including houses and apartments, which she rents out.

"Leo gave me this great opportunity," she said. "I just knew something good was going to happen."

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