



OPINION COLUMNISTS

Brian Gabler: California and Ventura County are good for business



Associated Press Workers sort chardonnay grapes during harvest at the Far Niente winery in Oakville in this Aug. 25 photo. California is the leading state in job creation over the last 12 months.

Posted: Nov. 28, 2015

When asked to name business-friendly states, California is probably not high on your list. Unquestionably, there are many regulations here — some put in place for very good reasons, others for crazy reasons. Yet, despite the perception by some that it's

impossible to do business in California, especially in the manufacturing sector, there is plenty of evidence to prove otherwise.

California is the No. 1 manufacturing state in the country. National Association of Manufacturers statistics show that 1.25 million people are employed by more than 35,000 manufacturing companies in the state.

Ventura County has more than 900 local manufacturers contributing mightily to our county's economy. Manufacturing companies like Dynamic Automation, Freedom Designs and Jaxx Manufacturing are part of the 20,000 diverse small and medium-sized businesses that are flying under the radar, yet hiring most of Ventura County's workforce.

California and Ventura County have benefits that give us a distinct advantage. We are located on the Pacific Rim so our ports are convenient for overseas shipping and receiving to and from Asia. We have one of the best state university systems in the country that continually attracts federal research dollars and where businesses — from start-ups to established entities — pull talent. California has 11 universities in the U.S. News & World Report's top 100 U.S. School ranking, with nine of those in the top 50.

Here are other surprising factoids:

n California is No. 1 in business profits (source: Businessweek and Bloomberg).

n California is No. 1 in job creation for the last 12 months ending Sept. 30 with 444,300 new jobs (source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

n California ranks 18 out of the 50 states for the lowest effective

state and local business tax rates, lower than Texas, Nevada, Arizona and Florida (source: Ernst & Young).

A business owner can be tempted by out-of-state tax incentives, but quality of life also matters in location decisions — to both business owners and their employees. A recent study by the USDA measuring climate, topography and other environmental qualities put Ventura County on top. Near-perfect climate, easy access to nearby mountains, deserts and the ocean and a variety of year-round outdoor activities are benefits that tax incentives can't buy.

Another misconception about California is that small-business owners are left to their own devices. In Ventura County, a wealth of organizations provide assistance to businesses in complying with regulatory requirements and provide services, consulting and training that can strengthen and grow every business.

Resources include the Workforce Development Board (workforceventuracounty.org), Economic Development Collaborative-Ventura County (edc-vc.com), Small Business Development Center (edcsbdc.org), our community colleges, universities, cities and local governmental agencies. These organizations help thousands of businesses each year.

The Workforce Development Board, for example, provides employment, training and business resources to employers, job seekers and youth. The EDC-VC and Small Business Development Center offer business consulting services including capital sourcing, human resources, manufacturing efficiency, government contracting, start-up assistance, technology, business management and marketing and sales. SCORE, Women's Economic Ventures and local chambers of commerce provide information and services to the business community.

All of this is not to say that the business climate in California is rosy. Very real red-tape issues can cause business owners to throw up their hands in frustration and search for greener pastures. Yet, we hear of business owners who have relocated to another state only to regret the move. Every state has its pros and cons.

If you run a small or medium-sized business, contact the above organizations, universities and the city in which you operate to find out how they can help. You will find a surprisingly friendly response.

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