

Calgary is better than you think!

By Bruce Graham

I suppose it's true that residents of any city are the best promoters of that city, not to mention the worst critics of it. That is definitely true when it comes to Calgary.

A perfect example of this is *The Vital Signs* report, published by the Calgary Foundation last month. The report, based on an online survey completed by more than 800 Calgarians, gave Calgary less than glowing ratings. The citizens of Calgary handed out a lot of C's and D's, even an F, but not a single A or even an A-.

Are we being too tough on ourselves? Is there really nothing about Calgary that deserves a top grade?

There is no question that our city has changed significantly over the past few years and with significant growth comes some challenges. We certainly hear a lot more talk about crime, commute times, the high cost of housing, homelessness, the availability of doctors, etc... These days, it seems that when reading the newspaper or listening to the news, the perception you get of Calgary is of an unsafe city where poverty is a huge issue, probably not the best place to raise a family. This is not particularly helpful when trying to solve the number one issue for Calgary businesses, the attraction and retention of talent, people.

Don't get me wrong, I think our 'big city' issues are real and need attention, but Calgary may not be as bad as we think. Let's take homelessness for instance. This received the only F in the report. While any rate of homelessness is unacceptable and we need and should do everything possible to address this issue, Calgary actually has a lower homelessness ratio at 1 per 2331 persons in comparison to other major cities in Canada such as Vancouver and Toronto.

While our city's population has been increasing, our crime rate has been on the decline. Calgary's poverty rate is lower than any other major Canadian city and it has been declining since 2000. And while our commute times have increased, they are still the lowest in comparison to other major Canadian cities.

So we're not quite a utopia, and probably never will be despite all of our efforts. That doesn't mean we should stop trying but we should, once in a while at least, be conscious and recognize all the great things this city has to offer.

Our city has more opportunities available to its citizens than any other city I know. We have great parks and a world renowned bike path system. We have a great health system; well above the

national and provincial average for health access. We have a great education system and have the highest composite learning index amongst all Canadian cities.

We are only one hour's drive from arguably one of the best playgrounds on earth, the Canadian Rockies and we know how to throw a great party and we've been doing it every year since 1912. We have a friendly and giving community, who volunteer more than any other Canadian city, in fact more than double than the National average.

One of the first things I've noticed about Calgary since I arrived here is that anything is possible. From opening your own business, to helping your community or make the world a better place to live, Calgarians think they are able to do anything and even if they can't, they will try. This is worth a lot in my books.

As much as we criticize and want to improve our city, we should also learn to allow ourselves to be proud of the great city we live in. It is a great city and it is definitely a city worthy of raising my family in. If we truly want to make Calgary a greater city than what it already is, we need to give it some credit and build on what we have.