

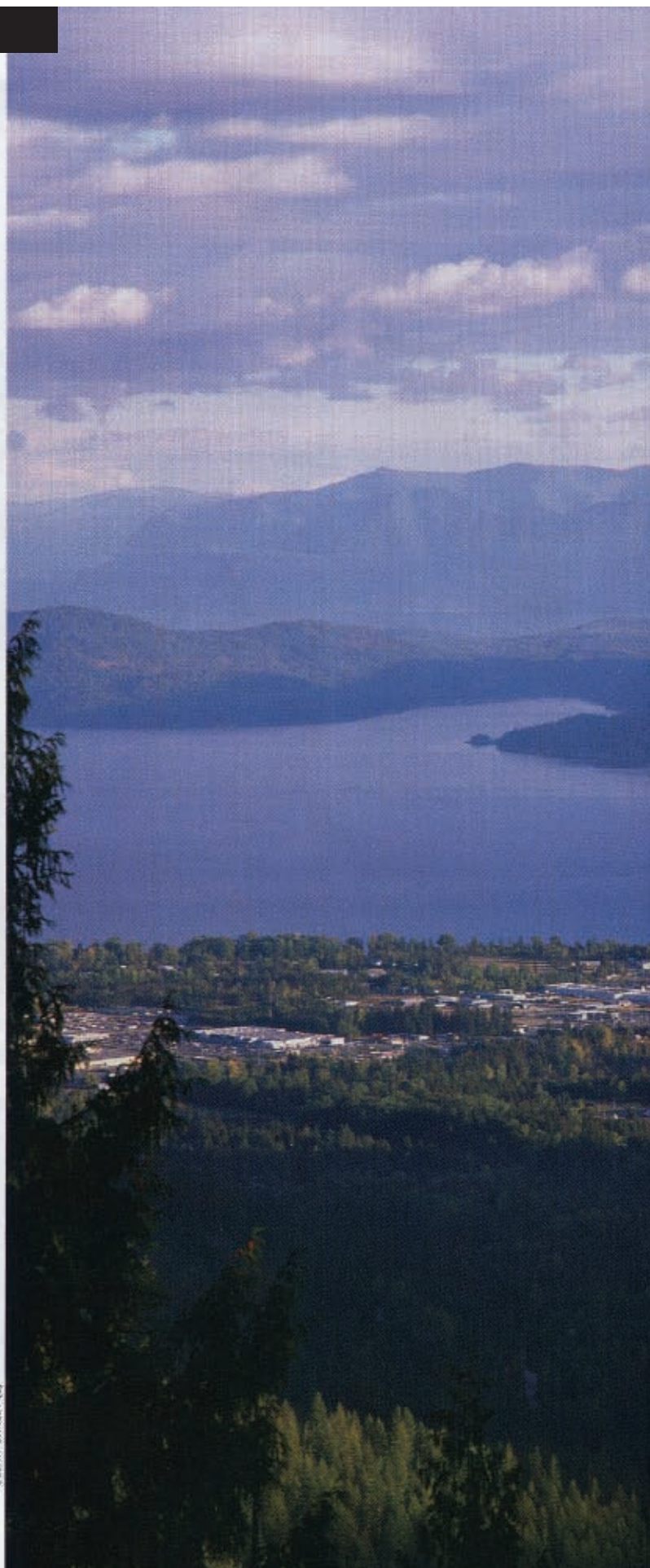
**The West's
greatest
small towns,
neighborhoods, and
new communities**

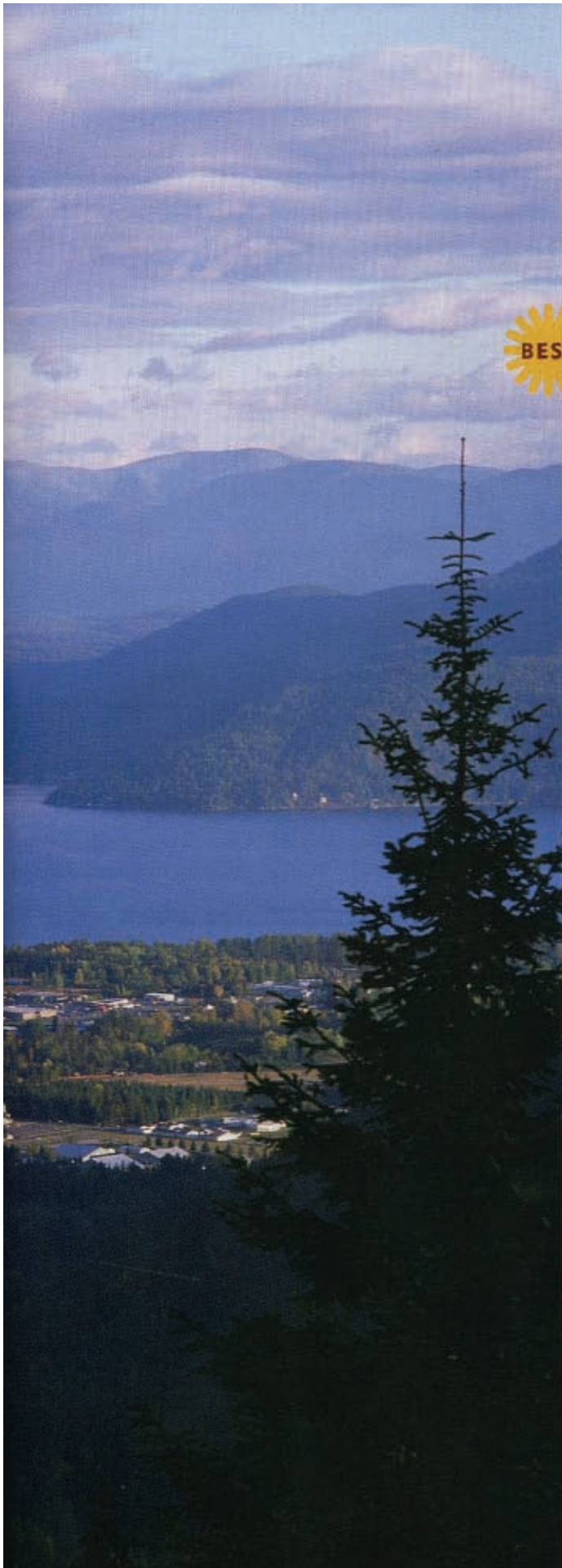
The best places to live

For *Sunset's* fourth biennial salute to the West's best communities, we turned to the ultimate experts: our readers. We asked you to nominate the neighborhoods, cities, and towns you think are outstanding places to live. The response? Overwhelming. Letters and emails by the hundreds nominated places as varied as Honolulu and Ketchikan, Alaska.

It was inspiring to hear from so many people who love where they live—and who work so hard at making those places wonderful. The perfect hometown may be in the eye of the beholder. But the one constant is that it takes great people to make a great place to live.

GLENN OAKLEY (2)





A spellbinding setting beside Lake Pend Oreille (far left) makes Sandpoint a magnet for vacationers—and new residents—from around the West. At left, kayakers paddle near Sandpoint's Cedar Street Bridge.

BEST SMALL TOWN

Sandpoint

IDAHO

Ask Sue Haynes what you call a Sandpoint resident, and she answers, "Lucky!" A town-council member, Haynes's roots go back three generations in this Idaho Panhandle town set on the shores of Lake Pend Oreille.

"This was a wonderful place to grow up," she says. "As teenagers, our big rebellion was to sneak out of the house at night and watch the sun come up over the lake."

The town's character hasn't really changed. Lumber was Sandpoint's mainstay until the 1980s, and as that industry waned, the town turned to other types of manufacturing, plus tourism and the arts. Today art galleries and studios dot downtown. Another landmark is the 1906 Cedar Street Bridge, now a two-level shopping promenade. And the Panida Theater, a 1927 Mission revival-style gem rescued and restored by the community, is thronged most weekend evenings.

The Panida is still a beloved spot for Haynes. "Saving that theater was a big job for a small community, but we really pulled together," she says. As if Sandpoint residents aren't already fortunate, they also make their own luck.

—LORA J. FINNEGAN

MORE GREAT SMALL TOWNS

■ **Port Townsend, Washington.** This historic seaport of 8,500 holds numerous galleries and much splendidly restored Victorian architecture. www.ptguide.com or (360) 385-2722.

■ **Sutter Creek, California.** A hamlet of 2,375, Sutter Creek is one of the best-preserved towns in California's Gold Country. www.suttercreek.org or (209) 267-1344.



SANDPOINT ESSENTIALS

FOUNDED: 1901

POPULATION:
About 7,500

ELEVATION:
2,100 feet

AVERAGE COST OF 3-BEDROOM, 2-BATH HOME:
\$125,000–\$132,000

AVERAGE JANUARY TEMPERATURES:
High 34°, low 26°

LOCAL PLEASURE:
Panida Theater

INFORMATION:
Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce, www.sandpointchamber.com or (208) 263-0887