

Make Your Holiday Shopping Dollars Count; Buy Local

Whether you are continuing to tighten your belt or relaxing and letting it out, odds are great you will be spending money this holiday season. So why not put those shopping dollars to use and help the local economy?

It's important to grow jobs and increase tax revenue. As consumers, we say we want more options and diversity when we shop. Each of us has the power to help make that happen. From holiday gifts to holiday feasts, spending money at locally owned stores can have a great impact on the community. One individual can't do it alone, but together the impact is significant.

Spending Locally Creates a Ripple Effect

Studies show that in Chicago, for every \$100 spent locally \$68 remains in the economy. For Grand Rapids, Mich. that number is \$73 out of \$100. While the numbers may vary slightly from city to city, the results are the same. More money stays in a community when consumers make purchases from locally owned businesses.

Locally owned businesses are more likely to donate to local charities, buy from other locally owned businesses and pay local salaries. A big box or chain store may have management offices located in another city, whereas smaller businesses are more likely to have all their staff on site.

As the money moves back through the community and gets recirculated, it generates additional tax revenue adding money to local coffers. This money is then used for city services and infrastructure.

Local Businesses Have Character

When you walk into a big box or chain establishment, you know exactly what you will find. In fact, the store or restaurant may look exactly like one in another city or state. But local stores and restaurants are unique. They provide a special experience that can't be duplicated. They are what add character to tourist destinations and quaintness to downtowns.

When you shop in a large chain your buying power is diluted. In a small shop each purchase counts. When you buy an item you're telling the owner that item sells and they should continue to carry it. That is why selection in smaller stores is often more original and distinctive.

National Trend is Gaining Local Moment

Buying local is a growing trend across the country. American Express hoped to gain customers through a promotion urging shoppers to visit local stores the day after "Black Friday." The company is offering 200,000 cardholders a \$25 credit if they registered on the campaign's website and used their cards at appropriate stores on Nov. 27.

Last year, the Rockford Chamber of Commerce hosted Cinda Baxter, the organizer of the viral campaign "The 3/50 Project," to speak about the benefits of buying local. Baxter urges consumers to pick three local stores they would miss if they disappeared and spend a total of \$50 on purchases in those stores each month. She claims that if half the working population did this, it would generate \$42.6 billion in revenue nationally.

Additionally, the Winnebago Buy Local Initiative involves nearly 70 local businesses and has a Facebook following of more than 1,000 fans. Their efforts focus on transforming our local economy toward green jobs, sustainable industries and buying local first. Several of their members are also Rockford Chamber members.

We have them; Take time to explore them

Big box stores and chains still play an important role in the local economy. They employ local workers and provide access to a variety of consumer goods. However, if we don't make some of our purchases at smaller, local stores, those stores won't stay in business.

So, what's on your shopping list this season? Is it a new toy for your nephew, a unique outfit for mom, golf supplies for dad or something for your best friend, the gourmet chef? From downtown to museum gift shops to Edgebrook Shopping Center, Rockford has dozens of unique, locally owned retail outlets that can meet all your shopping and dining needs. This holiday season I challenge you to use some of your money to grow our local economy.

If you don't know where to look, check out our website at www.grockford.com, stop by the RACVB office at 102 N. Main Street located at the corner of State and Main Streets in downtown Rockford or visit the Community Information Center inside the Clock Tower Resort and Conference Center.