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## Investing in community idea behind 'Buy Local Day'

By Kasia Pierzga

The eager shoppers who filled the aisles at Scott's Bookstore in downtown Mount Vernon last weekend weren't just buying holiday gifts.

According to store Manager Megan Scott O'Bryan, those shoppers were making an investment in a strong, sustainable Skagit County economy.

O'Bryan is one of a growing band of local merchants who have joined together in a campaign to encourage people to spend their money at Skagit-grown businesses rather than at chain stores based out of town — or out of state.

They're promoting Saturday, Dec. 4, as Skagit County's first-ever Buy Local Day, when shoppers are encouraged to invest in their communities by spending money at local businesses. The effort was launched with the help of Sustainable Connections, a Whatcom County-based, nonprofit organization that seeks to promote stronger communities.

The idea behind the effort is that money spent at local, independent businesses has a ripple effect that benefits the whole community, O'Bryan said.

For example, when customers buy books at Scott's, their money indirectly helps support dozens of local businesses. That's because the bookstore does business with other Skagit-based firms, such as a local accountant, an electrician, a plumber, a heating specialist, an office supply store and a computer consultant. And because each one of those businesses is owned by people who live in Skagit County, that money gets spent again and again, right here in the community.

"People don't realize how important each small purchase is," O'Bryan said. "It all adds up."

Local businesses also pump money into the local economy in other ways, like the cash and in-kind contributions they make to local schools, nonprofits, charitable organizations and other groups that play a big role in making Skagit County a great place to live.

That's much different from what happens with money spent at a big-box store, said O'Bryan. While they probably hire local workers, and they sometimes donate money to local groups, much of the money earned by those stores ends up at the corporate office, which more likely than not is far away in another state.

Like Arkansas, for example. But hey, we're not naming names here.

I'm all for this "buy local" stuff. In fact, I'd like to urge people to "read local," too. After all, the Skagit Valley Herald is a local business, and the paper you're reading right now is the product of a combined effort by 120 people who work and spend money right here in Skagit County. Besides, if you want to find out what's happening in your local community, you're not going to find it in USA Today. Supporting local businesses not only strengthens the local economy, it's also a way to preserve Skagit County's unique character, O'Bryan said. If all the little family businesses disappeared, all we'd be left with would be a maze of parking lots and strip malls.

"Skagit County has little towns with so much character," she said. "The only way we're going to preserve that is to get people to shop local."



Scott's Bookstore Manager Megan Scott O'Bryan is one of about 60 local merchants who have joined forces to promote Buy Local Day on Saturday, Dec. 4, when Skagitonians are urged to support the local economy by spending their money at businesses owned by local residents.

Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald