

The Western Front Online

Bellingham shops local



By Kara Johnson
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Saturday was Sustainable Connection's second annual Buy Local Day, which is a campaign to remind consumers to think locally when starting their holiday shopping and to continue it all year, Sustainable Connections executive director Michelle Long said.

In honor of Buy Local Day, many businesses organized promotional events to encourage people to shop. Mallard Ice Cream & Cafe gave away Moka Joe Inc. coffee and donated apple cider from Bellewood Acres, Apples and More.

Mallard also had a drawing for other prizes that shoppers could redeem at businesses throughout Whatcom County, Mallard employee Paige Walker said.

Walker said she helped set up for Buy Local Day.

"It is better to (buy local) because we buy our ingredients from local organic farms whenever possible, and it helps support the local growers and the local economy," she said.

Throughout Whatcom County, approximately 350 locally and independently owned businesses participated in the event -- a program that Sustainable Connections events manager Cathy Lehman said emphasized the need for community members to make a statement with their dollars.

Every dollar that a person spends at a locally independently owned business is a dollar put back into the community, she said.

Long said these efforts are what distinguish the community and strengthen the local economy.

"If we want Bellingham to be a unique place to live, we have to support our local businesses," she said. "They are the ones that are supporting us -- they are the ones showing up at festivals and events. This relationship creates support for entrepreneurs and new jobs, and this support ripples back into the economy."

Sustainable Connections office manager Heather Snapp said locally owned businesses give two and a half times more donations to nonprofits and other organizations than large businesses.

"It is important to try to think local first when buying things in any community, whether you are in Whatcom County or another state," she said. "The focus is on independently owned businesses local to the community you are in. Local business owners live in the communities and have more of a stake in the economy."

Small local businesses are the largest employer in the U.S., as well as in Whatcom County, as far as providing the most jobs to residents, according to the "Top 10 reasons to Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local" fact sheet on the Think Local Web site.



Kara Johnson/The Western Front
Mallard Ice Cream & Cafe employee Paige Walker helps a customer Saturday during Buy Local Day.

business owners often purchase locally produced goods and services from other local businesses, according to the Web site. Thus, money is kept in the community.

A board of directors, comprised of owners and managers of local businesses, and Sustainable Connections developed "Buy Local Day."

What started as a local campaign is now being replicated throughout the country, in cities such as Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., and San Francisco, Long said.

It is not always possible to purchase all local items when shopping, Lehman said.

For instance, bananas are not grown in Whatcom County, and local business owners do not want people to stop eating bananas. So they titled their campaign Think Local First, meaning if something is available locally, try it.