

# Think Global, Shop Local

## Use your dollars to help build your community

By Tim Johnson

It's so easy to send your money out of town.

It just seems easier and more efficient and even cheaper to pile in the car and head to a big mall or a fluorescent-filled superstore to buy everything from gift wrap to underwear. Every time we choose big-box retail—whether it's Barnes & Noble or Wal-Mart or McDonald's—we pass up an opportunity to re-invest our money directly into our community.

As a result, businesses close or move to stripmalls, jobs are lost, downtown storefronts get boarded up. Our "special places" vanish, replaced by a strip city of numbing sameness, mile-upon-mile of generic franchise outlets.

But... it's still so easy to send your money out of town.

Apart from the convenience there's also those low, low prices, you say.

But did you know that money spent locally circulates longer and gets reinvested with greater frequency? That's the findings of a report released last month by economists who studied local

buying and spending habits of a suburb of Chicago—Andersonville. The study was funded in part by that town's chamber of commerce.

The study compared the economic impact of 10 local businesses to 10 chain stores in the same industries. Measuring more businesses and broader economic factors than previous studies, the Andersonville study found that for every \$100 spent in a chain store, \$43 continues to circulate locally. When the same \$100 is spent in a locally owned business, that value jumps by 70 percent, to \$73.

Local businesses, the study found, tend to spend more of their revenues on labor and purchase services and goods from other local businesses at much higher rates than the chains. In addition, profits from locally owned businesses stay in the community while the local firms contribute more money to local charities and fundraising efforts, the report said.

The study concluded that the local economic impact in Andersonville is \$179 per square foot for locally owned retail, compared to \$105 per square foot

generated by the chain stores.

"That means 70-percent more money circulating in the local economy, which may mean 70-percent more home improvement, 70 percent more in the collection plate and 70 percent more in taxable transactions to fund city services," the study said. Low, low prices? Depends on what it is you really intend to buy with your money.

While people are slowly tumbling to the economic benefits and sheer charm of a local focus, Bellingham businesses hope to accelerate the learning process. For the second year, participating businesses will sponsor Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local. The weekend of sales, gifts and prizes serve to educate shoppers on the benefits of spending their retail dollars in their communities.

As in so many things, Bellingham is just slightly ahead of the curve in this concept. Portland, Ore., is launching its first "Think Local Day" with a decal and materials eerily similar to those found here.

"Locally owned, independent

businesses are the backbone of the local economy," says Michelle Long, director of Sustainable Connections. "Bellingham's Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local campaign is designed to draw attention to the benefits of shopping at local merchants and to provide an easy way to identify locally owned businesses." Window decals and display materials help shoppers quickly find the stores that value a living economy.

A living economy sustains community life, economic viability, and the natural environment, explains Rick Dubrow, who serves on the board of Sustainable Connections

"By addressing these needs, business owners can grow their companies in new ways, providing more fulfilling jobs, healthier communities, and greater economic security for their bioregions," Dubrow says.

Members pledge themselves to special deeds or projects that exist just outside the scope of a focus on bottom lines and earnings. These projects take many forms, from challenges to big box outlets

to ambitious plans to reuse and recycle materials, develop an alternative dollar, or plant flowers downtown. Together they offer a new economic vision. Focusing on socially conscious business principles and homegrown ingenuity, they offer hope that we can overcome development trends that suck the resources out of local communities.

The vibrancy of this effort is palpable. Whether at a gallery walk at night or a "Buy Local Day" you can see the excitement on people's faces as they stroll from business to business, visiting, shopping, feeling a part of something special. That's what shopping local is all about.

*Celebrate Buy Local Day November 13.*



73¢ of every dollar spent at a local business continues to circulate in the local economy. Only 42¢ of every dollar spent at a chain store continues to circulate.

--Source: Andersonville Study, October 2004

### Downtown Dollars

An experiment in local economy, Downtown Dollars allow users to purchase items of their choice at any participating establishment in downtown Bellingham. Essentially a generic gift certificate, Downtown Dollars are designed to focus retail activity in the urban center. Downtown Dollars are not only a perfect gift for the hard to buy for, they are also a great way to support the community and buy local.

You may purchase Downtown Dollars in \$5, \$10, & \$20 increments through Bellingham's Downtown Renaissance Network at (360) 527-8710 or at any of the participating businesses listed below:

- ACADEMIC OUTFITTERS • ALLIED ARTS OF WHATCOM COUNTY • AMERICAN MUSEUM OF RADIO & ELECTRICITY • ART & FRAMES, INC. • BARBO FURNITURE • BARGAINICA • BIJOUX • BLUE HORSE GALLERY • BOUNDARY BAY BREWERY & BISTRO • CORE KINETICS PILATES & MOVEMENT STUDIO • DOWNTOWN EMPORIUM • DRAGONFLY ELEANOR STEELE SKIN CARE SALON • EN VOGUE HAND AND FOOT SPA • EVERYTHING IN SIGHT OPTICAL • FAIRHAVEN FRAMES IN DOWNTOWN BELLINGHAM • FOURTH CORNER FRAMES • GARYS' MENS & WOMENS WEAR • GIUSEPPE'S ITALIAN RESTAURANT • GREEN TOUCH • THE GREENHOUSE • THE GROTTO HAIR STUDIO • THE HANG UP GALLERY • HILTON'S SHOES • INDIA GRILL • KIDS NORTHWEST • KULSHAN CYCLES • LA VIE EN ROSE FRENCH BAKERY • LANDLUBBER MERCANTILE • THE LOFT SALON & HERBAL CLINIC • MALLARD ICE CREAM • THE MALT SHOP • MARK BERGSMAN GALLERY • MOUNT BAKER THEATRE • MOUNT BAKERY • NORTHWEST COMPUTER SUPPLIES • OTION • OVER THE FENCE • OYSTER CREEK CANVAS COMPANY • PACIFIC MARINE EXCHANGE & GALLERY • QUIST VIOLINS • RUNNINGSHOES.COM • SCIENTIFIC NATURE HEMP EMPORIUM • SOJOURN • SOUND MASSAGE • SPINNAKER PHOTO IMAGING • STUDIO UFO • TERRA ORGANICA • TEXTYPE • UPFRONT THEATRE • WAXING MOON MASSAGE THERAPY • WHATCOM MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ART • YARY PHOTOGRAPHY

