

BOOKSELLING **THIS** Week

Businesses Look to Create Sustainable Connections With Consumers

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On Saturday, December 6, Sustainable Connections (SC), a Bellingham, Washington, local-business network, will be holding a "Buy Local Day." The event kicks off a holiday season-long promotional campaign in which SC is asking Whatcom County, Washington, consumers to "Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local." Inspired by Austin Unchained, which was held November 15 and organized by the Austin Independent Business Alliance, the aim of SC's Think - Buy - Be Local campaign is to educate consumers about both the intrinsic and economic value that independents bring a community.



"The purpose [of SC] is to build a living local economy," said Chuck Robinson, co-owner of Village Books in Bellingham and an SC board member. "[Think - Buy - Be Local] ... was prompted by Austin. Early on when we began creating our 'Buy Local' campaign we knew that [AIBA President and BookPeople Owner Steve Bercu] was going to do it. At our [SC] Board retreat [in early September] ... we decided the buy local campaign should be the highest priority for the organization."

SC, which is part of the national business network created to support positive change in local communities - Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), is promoting the day in a myriad of ways. First, while the organization has 200 members, not all are

retail stores. So to widen the scope of the Think - Buy - Be Local campaign, SC opened participation to every retail business whether the store was an SC member or not, Robinson noted. "So we have well over 200 retail businesses participating," he said.

Participating stores are being asked to use the logo that SC has created for the campaign -- which shows a picture of Mount Baker and the "Think Local, Buy Local, Be Local" slogan -- as much as they can. "Businesses use the logo in advertising," Robinson explained. Additionally, participating businesses are asked to place a decal on their door. This week's the alternative newspaper, *The Bellingham Weekly*, contains several different ads from retailers using the Think - Buy - Be Local logo in it.

SC is providing a "retail kit" free to members and \$20 to nonmembers, which Robinson said has sold very well. The kit includes a sticker to identify the store or business as locally owned and operated; a store poster outlining how buying from locally owned stores sustains the local economy; a "thank you for buying local" handout for customers that outlines the benefits to the community; suggestions for in-store activities; and a listing on SC's Web site, www.Thinklocal.org. The Web site, which was created for the campaign, includes PDFs of the Think - Buy - Be Local poster and logo, as well as informational sheets, such as the "Top Ten Reasons to Think - Buy - Be Local."

SC has hired a marketing company -- also a member of the alliance -- to help promote the campaign. "They created a game that starts on Saturday ... in which people gather receipts from a variety of local businesses," Robinson said. The game gives consumers three ways to win. Prizes will be awarded to "The Local Lover," the person who collects receipts for the most days between December 6 and 31; "The Safari Shopper," which awards the shopper with the most receipts from the highest number of geographically diverse places throughout Whatcom County; and "The Buy-Local Hero," the grand prize, which awards the shopper who saves receipts from the highest number of unique, locally owned businesses in Whatcom County. The Grand Prize is a month of dining at locally owned restaurants. The other winners each receive a \$100 gift certificate to any participating locally owned business in the county.

Aside from the game, Robinson said that participating stores would spotlight the event in their own ways. In its store newsletter, *Chuckanut Reader*, Village Books promoted the campaign by citing facts from "Economic Impact Analysis: A Case Study, Local Merchants vs. Chain Retailers," a study commissioned by Liveable City, a local Austin nonprofit group, and AIBA, BookPeople, and Waterloo Records, and its more recent study, "An Analysis of the Potential Economic Impact of Austin Unchained." The latter study showed that shifting all buying to local companies for just one day could result in a \$15 million impact on the local economy. (To read more about these studies, [click here](#).)

Village Books will also be promoting a number of local authors.

Robinson noted that he knew of "a local wood fire pizza establishment [that] has invited someone to come in to talk about the local products used in their pizza." All in all, it's open to each individual retailer to decide how they wish to promote December 6 and the entire "Think - Buy - Be Local" campaign.

Thus far, these efforts have attracted media attention, including coverage by *The Bellingham Weekly*, the local radio station, and "KGMI is planning to do a big story on it for Friday," Robinson reported. He continued, "I suspect this will be the first of an annual Buy Local day. We want to educate people about buying local -- what it does for the community and how it keeps a community unique." --[David Grogan](#)