

Sustainable Connections' 6th Annual "Buy Local Week"

by S. Vadinska

Economic meltdown or not, the season for giving will NOT be cancelled. Even if that Blackberry for dad will have to wait for your 401K to be resuscitated, you can still make homemade blackberry jam for mom (if you can just get her to reveal her recipe without spoiling the surprise). As local non-profit Sustainable Connections (SC) reminds us, when we buy our gifts (and everything else throughout the year) from independently-owned, local businesses our community is strengthened and our lives enhanced. According to their website (sustainableconnections.org), most of us here in Bellingham are well aware of the ongoing "Think Local" program and have some sense of why it is so vital to our community. Still, almost 1/3 of us could use a gentle prod to think before we buy. And as an advocate of strong local economies, I'd like to personally nudge everyone reading this to participate in this year's "Buy Local Week" from December 1-7.

As I've alluded, perhaps the best reason to buy local is to keep our economy healthy. When you purchase fresh vegetables from any number of local farmers at the Farmer's Market, crafts from local artisans, or concert tickets for a local band at a local venue, a higher percentage of your money stays in the community rather than going to corporate headquarters elsewhere.

According to studies, whether in the form of employee wages, business-to-business transactions, local taxes or the personal expenditures of those business owners and their employees, sometimes as much as 70 cents of every dollar of local purchases remains in our community, exchanging hands again and again.

Also, when you consider that local businesses employ most of us here in Whatcom County, to support them means we're also supporting our friends, family, and ourselves. Who knew that spending my last five bucks on a Boundary Bay I.P.A. could be so helpful to our local economy!?

Perhaps more important than, or at least inexorably intertwined with, economics, is the environmental factor. After all, without clean air to breathe and pure water to drink, who cares about evolving one's consumer consciousness. As the SC webpage states, "Locally owned businesses can make more local purchases requiring less transportation and generally set up shop in town or city centers as opposed to developing on the fringe. This generally means contributing less to sprawl, congestion, habitat loss and pollution."

Additionally, as Michelle Grandy, Member Services and Think Local First Manager, explains, there are several programs that are helping local businesses make "significant strides toward environmental sustainability." These include Whatcom Watershed, Toward Zero Waste, Whatcom Smart Trips, and Green Power. It's because these businesses are independent and locally owned that they "can make any transformative change in their business that they want to," including taking "significant steps toward being more environmentally friendly."

Some other reasons to choose to shop at local stores like Kulshan Cycles or Village Books may not be as obvious. For one, it keeps our community unique. How many times have you been driving

home from a long road trip and started salivating for Cardamom ice cream from Mallards? Okay, maybe that's just me. But surely, you've recognized over the years that very often when you visit other places you see the same old

chains serving the same old burgers and fries (thank you Fiamma Burger!)? This uniqueness keeps us feeling fortunate and even special (which we ARE!) and more likely to care about important issues that affect us all. Not surprisingly, this uniqueness translates into the products and services themselves. Local businesses are not bound by some national marketing plan or limited by some regional warehouse full of the same old styles. C'mon! Tell me you haven't noticed that 'Hamsters make their own—ahem...unlike-anyplace-in-the-lower-48 fashion statements?

Finally, you just get better service from local businesses owners. They know their products well, take their time to get to know you and truly care about our community, because like you, they call it home.

Although many of us have already slashed our holiday budgets, if we spend wisely we can still give our wonderful community the gift of sustainability.

To learn more about Sustainable Connections visit www.sustainableconnections.org.

S. Vadinska is a local singer-songwriter who teaches guitar and writes for the joy of it.



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