

## **Think local first**

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

We congratulate the Sebring Community Redevelopment Agency for its active approach to revitalizing downtown.

Facade grants -- homeowners within the CRA district can receive matching dollars from the CRA to paint or upgrade the outside of their homes -- have helped maintain residential neighborhoods. Now, a new grant program offers help to prospective small business owners by providing funds for permanent improvements inside leased commercial space.

The most obvious benefit will be the new shops and restaurants that will open downtown because of the program. The more variety and quality available, the more people will make downtown a destination of choice.

In our changing world, however, there are other, longer term benefits too.

According to the Web site [Sustainable Connections](#), there are at least 10 reasons shopping locally is good for both the local economy and area residents.

As mentioned in Sunday's article about the CRA by News-Sun staff writer Christopher Tuffley, studies have shown that of \$100 spent in a chain store only \$13 stays in the community, while for every \$100 spent in a local, family owned business \$45 stays in the community.

Studies have also shown that locally owned businesses spend significantly more money to make purchases or use the services of other locally owned businesses, further strengthening the community.

[Sustainable Connections](#) states that non-profit organizations receive an average of 250 percent more support from smaller businesses than they do from large ones.

Large chain stores typically echo each other -- being big rectangles designed around a logo. Rather than reflect the community, the big box store is meant to evoke brand loyalty.

On the other hand, family owned businesses often reflect the tastes and idiosyncrasies of their owners, creating a unique atmosphere and distinctive community character -- exactly the kind of environment that draws tourists.

By creating downtown centers, rather than malls on the fringes of town, drives are shorter and walking possible. This helps lower fuel consumption and air pollution, while it makes a public space more intimate and friendly.

It also encourages a more relaxed and pleasing atmosphere.

Small local businesses are the largest employer nationally, providing the most jobs to local residents. Owners of local businesses typically take more pride in their establishment, know more about their product, and highlight customer service. Because local business owners are a part of the community, they are less likely to leave, and more interested in the collective future.

Local businesses in town centers generally do not need additional tax investment in infrastructure, whereas a chain store may need water, sewer, road access, and traffic lights.

**Sustainable Connections** also says that a variety of small businesses, each selecting products based not on a national sales plan, but on their own interests and the needs of their customers, provides more choice.

Finally, in an age of increasing bland and same old, same old, research is showing entrepreneurs and skilled workers are more likely to invest in communities that value and support their one-of-kind business.

In other words, anything we can do as a community to enhance our common areas and encourage small business strengthens all of us.

Kudos to the CRA for looking into the tunnel and seeing light.