

# Second annual 'Buy Local Day' set for Nov. 13

by Dave Gallagher

When Michelle Long of Sustainable Connections came across a Bellingham photograph that was nearly 100 years old, she couldn't help chuckling to herself.

The picture has some people sitting around reading, but what caught her eye was a poster hanging on the wall above a desk, which read "We are for Bellingham — for goods made in Bellingham, for goods sold in Bellingham, for produce grown in Whatcom County — Are you for Bellingham?"

"This buy local concept seems like a relatively new idea, but really it's not," said Long, who has been organizing Bellingham's second annual Buy Local Day, scheduled for Nov. 13. "I'm not sure what issues they were dealing with back then, but I would think they are some similarities to what they were dealing with and what we're facing today."

Last year more than 300 businesses participated in last year's Buy Local campaign, and Long said there are more than 400 are involved this year.

The campaign is geared around the idea that buying products from these locally-owned companies provides more benefits for the community than buying the same products from a national chain store because more of the money spent stays in the local economy.

"We recognize that you cannot buy everything locally; our goal is create more awareness about these local business and ask customers to consider looking at the local busi-

nesses first before automatically going to a nearby chain store to get what they need," said Long.

How big a positive impact buying local has on a community compared to shopping at a national chain has been debated for years, because it has been difficult to put together an accurate study of where the money goes once it leaves the customer's hand and into the cash register.

There has been mounting evidence, however, that more money does stay in the community when shoppers go to locally-owned stores. A study completed in October by a group called Civic Economics compared the economic impact to companies in a Chicago suburb with their national chain competitors that were in the same community. The study said for every \$100 in consumer spending with a local firm, \$73 remained in the local economy. For every \$100 in consumer spending with a chain firm, \$43 remained in the local economy.

"Studies like this one confirm what I think many people have suspected: More money from local businesses stays in the community. As that additional money circulates around locally, it means more jobs within the community and a more diverse economy with one-of-a-kind stores instead of a community dominated by big box stores," Long said.

As the Bellingham campaign heads into its second year, Long said she's learned through their own studies that educating the community needs to be a top goal.

"We interviewed 82 shoppers last

year and were surprised to find how many really weren't aware what the term meant," Long said. "Some thought the term meant shopping in Bellingham instead of going to Seattle. We'll continue to let people know that shopping at locally owned businesses in Bellingham will provide the biggest benefit to the community."

The Buy Local concept appears to be catching on in other communities as well. Skagit County will have its first Buy Local campaign this year, and some cities are creating laws to promote local business development. San Francisco, for example, is looking

into the idea of banning "formalized businesses" from certain neighborhoods in an attempt to retain its local flavor.

"It can be difficult going up against these huge national chains, but we want to continue getting organized and sharing ideas," Long said. "Today there are certain products that you just can't find in a locally-owned store. But if we can continue to support the local businesses that are left, it may encourage others to start-up their own business to fill in some of these gaps. As this campaign grows, we can make a difference."