

Think local first

By Bill Cavanagh

We love Worcester. We love the people, the architecture, the politics and funkiness, and we love the unique stores and shops that give our city its special flavor. The character and spirit of our community is worth preserving and protecting.

Unfortunately for Worcester, we've all seen the damage that can be done to a square when chain stores arrive: raising the rents, homogenizing the look and feel, driving out locally owned shops and stores, and taking away our city's distinctive character.

We are a group of locally owned, independent Worcester businesses that has come together to promote and advance the Worcester Local First Campaign. Nearly 200 locally owned, independent Worcester businesses have joined Worcester Local First since its founding in September 2007.

This resident- and business-awareness campaign is modeled after successful grassroots efforts being waged in communities all across North America. These sustainability campaigns are making a big difference in the economies and cultures of more than 60 local economies, and that's exactly what we're up to here in Worcester.

The Worcester Local First Campaign has the following objectives:

- To raise awareness among consumers, businesses, and government agencies on the importance of buying locally

and to inform them about the locally owned, independent businesses that exist in Worcester.

- To support locally owned, independent businesses by encouraging retail and business-to-business consumers to spend more of their purchasing dollars locally. Even a 10 percent increase of local purchasing will make a profound, positive difference in the economic sustainability of locally owned, independent businesses and the overall economic health and well-being of our community.

- To strengthen the local economy.

Studies have shown that an average of only \$43 of every \$100 spent at chain and franchise businesses stays in the local economy, while an average of \$68 of every \$100 spent at locally owned, independent businesses remains local.

- To support public policy that improves the business environment for locally owned, independent businesses.
- To preserve the unique character and nature of our community.

These objectives do not factor in the profits made by locally owned, independent businesses. These dollars also stay in the community instead of leaking out through chains and franchises.

Nor do these objectives address the significant increase in fuel prices in recent months. Shopping local helps consumers to conserve on fuel consumption. It makes no sense to drive several miles to a chain or franchise store at a cost of 50 cents a mile when you can walk, bike or drive a shorter distance to a local, independent business that provides the same goods or services. By shopping locally, you save on both fuel and time.

In our brand new 2008 Business Directory, of which we are distributing 30,000 free copies, you will see that you have a direct, positive impact on our Worcester economy when you think and act local first. The Business Directory is our first major goal because it enables retail and business-to-business consumers to know which Worcester businesses are both locally owned and independent. Right now, no other such directory or database is publicly available.

By using our Business Directory and patronizing Worcester's locally owned, independent businesses, you will be helping to preserve and protect the character and spirit of Worcester. □



Bill Cavanagh is co-chair of Worcester Local First and owner of C.C. Lowell.

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LIVE BETTER!