



Times-News

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES IS A GREEN SOLUTION

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ECO NOTES



“Local” is the new buzz word. Communities, chambers of commerce, tailgate markets, PR firms and big box stores are all using (or misusing) the term to bring in sales. The Institute for Local Reliance reported that the largest bank in the world, HSBC, calls itself a local bank, as does the 500 outlet Winn-Dixie, WalMart and Hellman’s mayonnaise. Is there really a difference between independent local businesses and chains and big box stores that are located in our community? Don’t they all contribute to the tax base, hire local people and support the local economy?

According to Jeff Milchen, of the American Independent Business Alliance, a national organization that supports independent local business alliances, encouraging people to shop at big-box stores takes sales away from independent businesses who funnel more dollars out of town. Unlike chains, local businesses buy a great deal of goods and services, like accounting and printing, from other local businesses. The owners of local businesses also live and work in the community where they run their business and they tend to purchase more locally produced items, support local causes and play an important civic role in their community.

A recent study by the firm Civic Economics makes the issue crystal clear, for every \$100 spent locally, \$45 stays in the community. However, if the same dollars are spent at a chain store, the analysis found that only \$13 of that \$100 stays locally.

What of the environmental effect of local buying vs. stocking up at the ‘local’ MallWart? A study by Susan Handy, an expert on travel behavior at the University of California-Davis, examined eight neighborhoods and found that the proximity of stores to a community’s home made a substantial impact on their driving and ultimately on their “carbon footprint.” In neighborhoods with the most businesses, where homes were on average only one-fifth of a mile from the nearest store, 87 percent of residents regularly ran errands on foot. Where stores were further away, foot traffic went down nearly 70%.

Another study by Handy found that residents of an Austin, Texas neighborhood with numerous small stores within a half-mile radius made 20 percent of their food shopping trips on foot and logged 42 percent fewer miles driving to supermarkets than residents of two Austin suburbs that lacked neighborhood stores.

Since shopping accounts for 20% of our driving on average, and since most chains and big boxes are in malls and strip centers, further away from neighborhoods than locally owned stores, the impact of this is important. In the late 1970s, the average household drove 1,200 miles a year for shopping. Today, we log about 3,600 miles annually. Why the substantial difference? The box got bigger, a lot bigger. Between 1982 and 2002, more than 100,000 small retailers disappeared replaced by big-box stores that were many times larger, far fewer in number, and served a larger geographic areas. By encouraging walkable communities, studies have indicated that residents of communities drove 26% less than those who needed to drive everywhere. And developers and planners take note, in a recent report by CEOs for Cities, sales data was analyzed for 90,000 houses and found that, in 13 of 15 markets, those in neighborhoods with higher walk scores held value better than those in areas lacking destinations within walking distance.

Many of us appreciate living here because we get to know the farmer on a first name basis who grows our apples, gathers our local eggs and the artisan who builds our furniture. By supporting our local business community, we stabilize our local economy while keeping air quality and energy use in check. ECO is

working with the downtown Hendersonville business community on plans to create a greener downtown. Want to get involved? Call ECO at 692-0385.

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