



# Without Local Businesses We're Anywhere, USA

I took a drive through downtown Bedford the other day. It was my first visit and I found it dismaying. While the town has attractive residential areas, main street is a sad place—not quite Atlanta after Sherman, but definitely in need of some urban renewal. It's typical of what happens to downtowns after giant national chains vanquish the local businesses.

Thirty years ago, I lived for a short time in Greenwich, Connecticut. Nice town. It has beautiful architecture, an ocean, and an average household income of around \$750,000. It also has a long, winding main street that 30 years ago boasted wonderful quaint shops and indigenous restaurants. I went back a few years ago and was saddened to find that the big national chains had taken over and that downtown Greenwich looks like Anywhere, USA.

There but for the efforts of a lot of people could have gone Bloomington.

I don't know the history of how Bloomington managed to keep its visual identity while so many other cities and towns lost theirs, but I know I wouldn't be here if the downtown looked abandoned or like just another generic place. I love character too much.

Close your eyes and picture for a minute what Bloomington would be like without Nick's, The Irish Lion, The Uptown, tutto bène, The Trojan Horse, Little Zagreb, Scholars Inn, Max's Place, Samira, The Village Deli, or Runcible Spoon. Do we really want to live in a place where our dining choices are McDon-

ald's, Wendy's, Dominoes, Steak 'n Shake, Starbucks, and the Olive Garden?

Or imagine if you will Bloomington without Kleindorfer's, Relish, Different Drummer, Smith's Sport 'n Shoe, The Book Corner, à propos, Elements, The Grant Street Inn, Bloomingfoods, Sahara Mart, Optiks, Goods for Cooks, or a hundred other local businesses.

Those huge national chains can afford to bombard us with advertising day and night. And hey, a lot of their products are inexpensive and good quality (and some are junk that make us sick). It's hard not to head out to Wal-Mart when you need things for the house or to McDonald's when you're in a rush. We're all human. But why not make a point of giving our local shops and restaurants just a little bit more of our business.

It's one of the best ways I can think of to ensure that Bloomington stays Bloomington.

**Note:** This is the sixth issue of *Bloom*, marking the end of our first year of publication. When we started out, we encountered skeptics and enthusiasts in about equal numbers. I would like to thank all—the skeptics for making us work even harder, and the enthusiasts for helping keep us true to our vision.

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editor and publisher