



Why Shop Local

For those of you who read this column every issue, I'm sure I'm starting to sound like a broken record with my constant message of "shop local." But I can't help it. In this economic crisis, I feel it is just too important to let go.

Two stories in this issue demonstrate the point. In the article about Circles (page 54), a new organization that is helping the disadvantaged rise to middle class, there is a disturbing statistic: 23.5 percent of children in Monroe County are living below the poverty line. This compares with the national average of 16 percent. And this in a city with a great university, an outstanding community college (that trains people to get jobs), and a populace, I believe, as compassionate and community-minded as any in America (and I've lived a few places).

In another story about Mother Hubbard's Cupboard (page 66), there is this bit of news: The food pantry is now distributing free groceries to more than 1,900 people per week—a Mother Hubbard's Cupboard record. And these aren't homeless people; many are your neighbors—single moms working two jobs trying to support their kids, people who have recently lost their jobs, others who can't find work or enough work. Over at the Monroe County Community Kitchen, they surpassed their annual record for meals served, back on November 1, and expect to serve 175,000 by year's end. It is further alarming to note that 61 percent of those meals were for children.

Bloomington has many excellent social service agencies and charitable nonprofits and hundreds of volunteers who do all they can to help the less fortunate. Thousands more donate generously.

So how does shopping locally help? Small local businesses are the nation's largest employer and provide the most new jobs. Our best shot at creating new work opportunities here or restoring old ones is at the grassroots level.

Shopping locally also keeps our money here—58 percent more than if you shop at a chain store. When you buy on the Internet or from a catalogue, not a penny remains.

Here's another reason to shop locally. In my travels around Bloomington (and I get around), I have yet to meet anyone from a national chain who is volunteering on any nonprofit or charity board. There may be a few—if so I haven't met them. Chain-store owners and executives live in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other big cities. Their only interest in Bloomington is how much money they can take out of the community.

So this holiday season and all year long, I urge you to shop local. It's an easy way to make a difference.

Malcolm Abrams
editor and publisher