

CATALYST

RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE LIVING

Shop Locally: Think Before You Buy

Local First Utah urges support of local independent business

By Barb Guy

A tried and true conversation starter is the question, What's the last book you read? But I have a different question in mind: Where did you shop for the last book you bought? The answer might tell a bit about your politics.

If an actual person, a member of the community, owns the business where you shop, on average three times more of the money you spend there stays in town. The business owner, who might be your friend or neighbor, is more likely to use local independent manufacturers, distributors, accountants, cleaning companies, tax advisors, and on and on. Additionally, such business owners are more likely to use their own disposable income in support of other small business owners like themselves. That keeps your dollars ricocheting through cash registers all over town -- and repeatedly supporting our tax base -- rather than being shipped right out of the local chain store to corporate headquarters.

"Local businesses increase the diversity, richness, and texture of our culture," says Kinde

Nebeker, president of the Salt Lake Vest Pocket Business Coalition. The Vest Pocket folks have recently unveiled Local First Utah, a multiyear campaign to increase Utahns' awareness of the importance of using local independent businesses. Local First Utah will emphasize the specific, unique characteristics of such businesses and educate consumers about the greater impact their money has when spent locally.

"Our campaign encourages shoppers to think local first," Nebeker says. She acknowledges there are times when a shopper, after wondering if there's a local independent business that can provide what they're looking for, might elect to make their purchase from a nonlocal store. The point, she says, is to begin to cultivate the habit of thinking local first, and when possible, supporting local businesses. But shoppers often don't have a well thought out decision-making process. We hop in the car and head over to the big box store without even thinking about it. Nebeker hopes we'll all start a new process before we leave home, asking, "What local

business might sell that cup of coffee/hammer/CD/haircut/pet food/sweater/lunch that I need?"

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson attended a recent press conference announcing the campaign. Anderson, a proven champion of local businesses, provided a helpful illustration of what happens when we're lured away from supporting local independent businesses: Salt Lake City's local independent bookstores in 1972 sold 84% of books purchased in town. In 1990, they were down to 41%, and today they're a tiny 25% of all Salt Lake City book sales.

Michael Shuman, author of "Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age," a book about the importance of supporting local businesses, came to Salt Lake City recently to lend his support to the Local First Utah campaign. Shuman has been featured on NPR's All Things Considered and Talk of the Nation and PBS's The News Hour with Jim Lehrer. He said, "If you spend \$100 at a megabookstore chain store,

CATALYST

RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE LIVING

about \$13 stays in your community. If you spend \$100 at a local independent bookstore, about \$45 stays in your community."

While we're taking stock at the new year, let's consider participating in Local First Utah in 2005. It's a way we can all make a difference, and everyone who benefits will be right here in our own back yard. So next time someone asks you what you've been reading lately, be sure and also tell them which local independent store sold you your book.

Barb Guy is a regular contributor.

Copyright © 2005 New Moon Press,
Inc. All Rights Reserved