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## Shopping locally

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### Community businesses keep small town economic engine running

By **Kate Bassett**

Harbor Light Newspaper

The sounds of little feet clomping down the steep steps of Between the Covers Book Cellar; the feel of the pages against tiny fingers; the friendly wag of the store’s mascot pup, Bunter. These are the images that spring to mind, said Harbor Springs resident Molly Baker, as she thinks about buying her three children new books.

“There is value in the experience,” Baker said, as she described one of the benefits of supporting a local economy.

Baker, who owns The Outfitter in downtown Harbor Springs with her husband Josh, was talking about the importance of keeping holiday shopping dollars in the community.

“In this day and age, it is so easy to do something like shop online,” Baker said. “Yet we have to remember this: the American landscape is becoming increasingly homogenized and to live in a town like this, where you can walk into a shop and people still know your name, it’s a gift. We aren’t like Anywhere, USA—which can be found almost everywhere now—and we need to support our downtown to keep it that way.”

For months now, the word “economy” has brought tales of gloom and doom across the country and around the world. Large corporations seem to be crumbling left and right, leaving some to believe a depression is inevitable. There is, however, another way to look at the current financial picture. It could also be seen as an opportunity for local economies to return to more self-sufficient roots.

“It’s not time to panic, but it is time to be prudent, to live within our means, and to get back to the philosophy of supporting our own community,” said Carlin Smith, executive director of the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce. “When the financial crisis began coming down, all we heard about was Wall Street’s impact on Main Street. However, I am convinced that Main Street can rebuild Wall Street.”

Smith said that in tough economic times, people need to invest in their Main Streets. By supporting local businesses, he said, community members help keep their neighbors in jobs, help keep money moving here at home.

“If we take care of ourselves, we will be stronger as a nation. It is an old but true cliché, a dollar spent in

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your own community is circulated around seven times. It pays to shop local," he said.

In addition to supporting job security, shopping locally allows store and restaurant owners to give back to the community.

Josh Baker said his store—like many others in downtown Harbor Springs—"never turns away" a school organization or community group looking for assistance.

"From year book ads to discounts for sports teams to tons of donations to support community initiatives, we give a lot of money away in support of our town. The dichotomy comes when we support the schools and community and then people choose to load up their cars and head to Traverse City to shop. In the end, we can only support the town when people shop here."

Baker grew up in Harbor Springs, and said he remembers a time when the community was completely self-sustainable.

"That ability to stay right here for all of our needs, it is still here. It may not be as evident, but the truth is there's a lot available downtown. We have a great toy store. We have a great bookstore. We delivered a survey to businesses downtown recently, and handed out over 50 copies, which means there are 50 places that still have their doors open. We are trying to be a hometown store—with some success, thanks to our loyal customers—but I can't stress enough how important it is for people to try and shop in their own community before they head elsewhere."

Jeff Pagel, owner of The Clothes Post in Petoskey, said he could not agree more.

"It just makes sense," he said in a phone interview on Monday. "When local people shop local stores, the local economy remains healthy. We have to invest in our own community, because if we don't, shops will close down. If a business can't make it, it can't employ people who are normally out buying and using services in the community. It also can't pay taxes, which care for things like our town infrastructure and our schools. It negatively affects all of us when dollars leave our economy, and it helps all of us when they stay."

For Jennifer Shorter, of Grandpa Shorter's in downtown Petoskey, the community-building aspect of supporting area businesses is part of what makes this place a destination.

"We donate to the schools, the hospital, hospice, and so many other non-profit organizations, because we believe in how they positively impact our community. In turn, everyone must understand the connection between a healthy local economy and all the unique aspects of living here depending on that support. If we didn't have a downtown, where would we be? There is a feel-good part of knowing that spending money with locally owned businesses is making a difference. We want to celebrate that too," Shorter said.

When it comes to shopping close to home, Keith McGlaughlin, owner of Toski Sands Market and Wine Shop, said it is about an entirely local experience.

"We carry as many local products—particularly in our produce and specialty sections—as we can. We employ a local, knowledgeable staff that shares recipes and is dedicated to customer service. Local businesses help define a community."

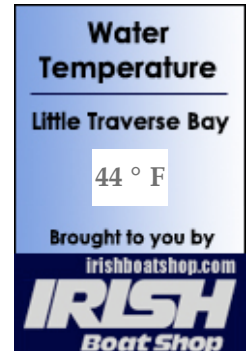
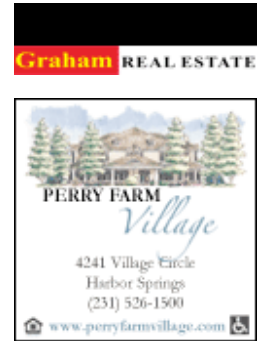
Jody Ewbank of the Pier Restaurant in Harbor Springs said local businesses are cooperating more than ever before to make shopping downtown as easy as possible.

"We have Chamber gift certificates that are available at the Petoskey or Harbor Springs Chambers, and they are good for any member business in either community. That is a good way people can stay local."

Ewbank said she has heard a lot of discussions that give her hope about how this area will weather the financial storm.

"People are really sensing that now, more than ever, they need to buy local. We all know that it may require a little more effort, and you know what? That's okay. It can be a good thing to spend time in local shops, rather than just choosing gifts off the internet. It can actually bring a lot of joy back into holiday shopping."

With local shop owners dedicated to creating that joyfilled experience, purchasing gifts should be anything but a chore, added Carrie Farley of Cutlers in Petoskey.



"Most of the business district will be keeping extended hours through the month of December," she said. "I know we will be staying open until 8 p.m. from December 1-Christmas Eve, and will be open Sundays as well. We're also serving cappuccino, and like most shops in town, we offer free gift-wrapping. We are always willing to go the extra mile for our customers. We're a small community, and so in essence, when people shop locally, they are doing something to help keep our area strong. That alone should make a shopper feel good."

The Outfitter's Jeanie Benjamin added that it is crucial community members realize that 99-percent of the time, prices are competitive in local stores.

"We don't mark things up. We have quality merchandise that we don't overprice, and we are so appreciative of the many, many customers we have that already recognize this. Our local businesses put so much back into our communities, and that support is one of the reasons we are so lucky to live here," she said.

As the executive director of a regional Chamber of Commerce, Smith said he recognizes that purchasing power is tighter this year, and that people will be carefully monitoring their holiday spending.

"People will be mindful of price and they will look for value," he said. "The way we make that work locally is to encourage people to buy gifts that are especially thoughtful. Buy one gift with a lot of meaning instead of a bunch of generic video games or the like. It takes a little extra work and thought, but if you spend some time planning, you can easily find great values that will create great memories right here in our local shops."

"In the book business," noted Jeanie Regentin, owner of Between the Covers, "buying from an independent seller is what keeps variety going."

"When you stay out of the big box stores and you buy local, you end up with more choices in the long run," she added. "In a place like Harbor Springs that is so seasonal, if we want to keep small stores open, we have to support them in the winter months too. The most direct reason to spend dollars in your own community? Almost all of that money stays right here. It's an invaluable part of supporting local business."

Almost as invaluable as the ability to reach out and touch a book's pages, purchase locally grown foods, wave to familiar faces in long-time storefronts, and live in northern Michigan, not Anywhere, USA.

***"We are trying to be a hometown store— with some success, thanks to our loyal customers—but I can't stress enough how important it is for people to try and shop in their own community before they head elsewhere."***

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