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NOVEMBER 24, 2018



'The life of your community'

Small business owners work together to promote their downtowns

By Eileen Mozinski Schmidt
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA — As technology has expanded its reach into modern life, retail options are increasingly accessible.

With a host of choices for shopping now available, downtown businesses are encouraging consumers to visit their stores by combining their marketing efforts.

"You want to come here because you'll have an experience," said Norm Bruce, president of the Waukesha Downtown Business Association and owner of Martha Merrell's Books & Toys.

He said the downtown businesses work together to build a series of annual events that bring people to the area for personal experiences and a sense of community connection.

Three of the biggest annual events the association works on are the Waukesha Farmers Market, Friday Night Lights, and the Silver Bell Campaign, according to Bruce.

The idea is that the businesses are stronger together, according to Bruce, who said the downtown merchants found they could expand their reach through such efforts.

Consumers are expected to increase holiday spending by

4.1 percent this year, according to a survey released by the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics on Oct. 24.

Consumer spending is expected to be spread across a variety of types of retailers in the coming weeks, with about 23 percent of those expenditures occurring at local and small businesses, the report said.

In Waukesha, the Silver Bell Campaign, which is about to kick off, is in the fourth quarter and encourages shoppers to come downtown for a host of events, including a tree lighting, parade, art crawl, and Santa run.

New to the campaign this year is a more enhanced social media outreach, including the addition of streaming advertisements.

The ripple effect

Bruce said that for every dollar spent at his store, 68 cents stays local, whether through local staff or the professional services the business requires.

And he said activities in the downtown business district create economic ripples throughout the area.

"Every event we do, to get to those events you have to drive through the rest of the city to

get here," said Bruce. "The rest of the city benefits."

Lori Boldig, co-president of the Downtown Oconomowoc Business Association, agreed.

"The small business is the life of your community," she said.

In Oconomowoc, Boldig said the downtown association has been operating for the past decade.

"There are more and more people interested in shopping local, shopping small business," she said.

Like Waukesha, Boldig said Oconomowoc's downtown merchants have worked together to create a series of annual

events for the community, like a Witches Night Out evening for women close to Halloween, a Fall Gallery Night, and a German Christmas Market, among others.

"Having these events showcases your city and your downtown," said Boldig, also owner of The Gallori.

She said the calendar of events has helped build Oconomowoc's reputation as "a destination spot."

Downtown events also foster a feeling of community, according to Boldig.

"For a lot of people, it's a social thing," she said. "You run into your neighbors here."



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River's End
GALLERY

By Eileen Mozinski Schmidt
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA — As shopping habits become increasingly diversified, the use of gift cards remains a role in driving the sales of many small businesses.

"Gift cards are fairly popular with our clients. We see many clients buying them for family members who are also clients at the salon or for friends referring friends," said Tom Bieringer, of Van Bier Salon in Waukesha, in an email to The Freeman.

Bieringer said the holiday season is a popular time for gift card purchases, but the salon is also realizing sales throughout the year "for birthdays, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day and anniversaries."

In a holiday spending survey released last week, the National Retail Federation reported that gift cards and certificates top the list of gifts consumers would like to receive, at 60 percent. That was followed by clothing and clothing accessories at 53 percent, and books, movies and music at 37 percent.

The gift of cards

Gift cards continue driving sales of small businesses

The survey was conducted earlier this month and is the 12th year in a row gift certificates and cards have topped the survey, according to the National Retail Federation.

Gift cards are a means for driving up revenue, providing an introduction to new customers, compete with major retailers, and increasing existing customer loyalty, according to the website Shopify. The site reported the gift card industry is supposed to be worth \$160 billion this year, citing data from gift card exchange site Gift Card Granny.

Most local retailers Lori Boldig knows in Oconomowoc utilize gift cards. Boldig, co-president of the Oconomowoc Downtown Business Association, noted that an area chamber program offers a means of supporting an array of local businesses, from gas stations to restaurants to retail, through a gift certificate purchase.

The chamber program includes between 75 and 100 area businesses where purchased cards can be utilized, according to Cherie Sonsalla, executive director for the Oconomowoc Area Chamber of Commerce.

The cards "can be redeemed same as cash," she said.

"It's a great way for people to not only give a gift, but also to support local business," said Sonsalla, noting the program includes various local businesses, including an accounting service, gyms, and lodging, among others.

But some say that even something as straightforward as a gift card requires careful marketing, both to attract the attention of busy consumers and to meet demands for today's shoppers.

Sonsalla said the chamber recently redesigned its gift card program, both to clarify how the cards may be used and to enhance the design appeal.

At Van Bier, Bieringer said the salon has also found it helps with sales to show consumers what the card, carrier and envelope all look like.

"We also let people know we can sell gift cards over the phone and mail to the recipient or just have the card in our system for use when the client comes in for their appointment," he said.



Submitted photo

The Oconomowoc Area Chamber of Commerce recently redesigned the gift cards offered through the chamber and area businesses. The website Shopify reported the national gift card industry is supposed to be worth \$160 billion this year, citing data from gift card exchange site Gift Card Granny.

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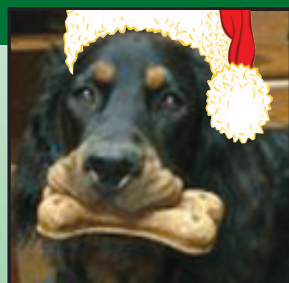
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Small Business Saturday

Stores set up for surge on Nov. 24

By Royce Podeszwa
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262-513-2651

WAUKESHA — Local small businesses and chambers of commerce are looking forward to Small Business Saturday on Nov. 24.

Small Business Saturday formed in 2010 in partnership with American Express and the Small Business Administration to help encourage shoppers to visit local retailers and restaurants. The national shopping holiday takes place the weekend after Thanksgiving every year, sandwiched between Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

"It is traditionally one of our biggest shopping days of

the year," said Jackie Schoenholtz, owner of Silly Willyz in Pewaukee. "That's our time to shine."

Schoenholtz said they plan to have a special deal, but what it is will be kept a secret until closer to the holiday.

Courtney Nassey, manager of The Steaming Cup in Waukesha, also said they will probably have a deal, but she isn't sure what it will be just yet.

Last year they gave away a cookie with every sandwich sold.

"This is definitely a good thing for the community," Nassey said.

Alicia Schuster, manager of Periwinkle's Bakery, said her bakery will be closed on Small

Business Saturday to give her employees a break for the holidays. Periwinkle's baked goodies will still be for sale at Rochester Deli on Small Business Saturday.

Dick Strassburger, director of the Pewaukee Chamber of Commerce, said the initiative is a great way to help out local retailers that have been hurting from online competition.

"Shop local every day, not just on Small Business Saturday," Strassburger said.

According to American Express, consumers have spent more than \$85 billion at small business over the last eight Small Business Saturdays alone.

More information can be found at www.shopsmall.com.



Marketing materials for the upcoming Silver Bells campaign in downtown Waukesha. Groups like the Waukesha Downtown Business Association work on creating community events like the campaign to attract consumers to the area.

Eileen Schmidt/Special to The Freeman

Small Business Saturday

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