



Area businesses to celebrate Small Business Saturday

Workers encourage community to shop locally especially after pandemic



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

Kira Baker, who works at the Plowshare Fair Trade Marketplace, a store that has been struggling during the pandemic, in downtown Waukesha.



Derek Johnson/Special to The Freeman

The inside of Big Guy's Magic in Pewaukee, which is one of many businesses participating in Small Business Saturday on Nov. 27.

By Derek Johnson
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA COUNTY — After facing pandemic-related problems for almost two years, businesses across Waukesha County are asking people to shop locally during the holidays, and especially on the upcoming “Small Business Saturday” on Nov. 27.

Workers at locally owned stores in Waukesha, Delafield and Pewaukee said they faced a unique set of problems this year. Kira Baker, who works at the Plowshare Fair Trade Marketplace at 219 W. Main St. in Waukesha, said that main issue the marketplace has had to contend with

is sourcing inventory.

She said that because the marketplace exclusively sells fair trade goods, most of which come from overseas, it was hard to get stock as the store's suppliers dealt with COVID-related supply shortages themselves. She also said that the supply shortage came after the store was shut down because of the pandemic last year, which was a problem that arose shortly after the store also dealt with a downturn in sales because of construction in downtown Waukesha.

“There is no respite,” Baker said.

She said that the main reason her store has been able to stay open; however, is

because people opt to shop at the marketplace instead of at retail franchises, and she encouraged other people to do the same.

“Buying locally stimulates the economy in your own community,” she said. “It supports your friends and neighbors.”

The Plowshare Fair Trade Marketplace isn't the only store facing these problems and surviving with the help of the community, either. Carol Guagliardo, the owner of Bliss Boutique at 620 Milwaukee St. in Delafield, said that 2021 has been a difficult year. She said that she has had a hard time getting stock, as many of her orders come in months later than expected or have been cancelled outright.

Guagliardo said that she ordered items for Christmas in May, only to have that order cancelled last-minute in October. But she said that her customers understand the problems that she's facing, and that because of loyal patrons, she's been able to keep her storefront open.

“They make a point to shop local,” Guagliardo said.

To inspire people to keep shopping locally, her store will be offering discounts on Nov. 27 for Small Business Saturday, a holiday American Express created to encourage people to help out small businesses like Guagliardo's during one of the busiest shopping seasons of the year.

Big Guy's Magic Shop in Pewaukee will also be participating in the holiday. Mary Eckl, who owns the store at 125 Oakton Ave., said her store has faced supply shortages and had to adapt to the pandemic. However, with the help of local shoppers, she said that she's been able to stay open and wants others to do the same.

“We believe in that ourselves as local business owners,” Eckl said.

For more information about Small Business Saturday, including a map of small businesses around Waukesha County, visit <https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small>.

Local events

You're never truly finished finding unique things about the town you live in. To see a side of your local community that you may not have experienced, keep an eye out for local events like fairs, festivals and craft shows.

Participation will introduce you to new passions, hobbies and create incredible networking opportunities. Events offer a chance to bring the community together and celebrate what makes its residents unique.

An excellent way to discover upcoming gatherings is by joining community pages on social networking channels. You can find concerts performed by local musicians, events hosted by various restaurants or

food trucks, and showcases for artists to sell their creations. Celebrate the distinctive traits of your town and the extraordinary people who help the economy tick.

Find a festival

When a music festival comes to town, local vendors and business owners unite to show off their goods to attendees. An in-town event offers a great chance to catch a well-known live band or indulge in your favorite local acts. Indulge in festive foods, reconnect with old friends and revisit your childhood in a fun and engaging atmosphere. Being a part of the magic also helps build a sense of bond throughout the community and celebrate dishes and traditions that make the location special.

Celebrate the arts

Show your appreciation for creativity by contributing to causes like museum exhibitions, orchestras and art shows. Events that celebrate your area's creativity can produce significant growth in terms of revenue and tax concessions. According to the Americans for the Arts organization, communities with arts and culture strategies are seen safer by their residents. They also



report more positive relationships between citizens and police as the arts are thought to bridge the two parties together.

Boost the economy

As exciting events take form around your community, support its potential suc-

cess by inviting family and friends from out of town. Spread the word to help draw more people to spend their money on unique goods and homegrown services in your local area. The additional funds can cause a substantial increase throughout the local economy.

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How consumers can show their support for local businesses

The road back to normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic figures to have some twists and turns. Even after the rollout of vaccines began in late 2020, public health agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization emphasized the importance of people keeping their collective guard up, as previously unseen variants of the virus were still being discovered.

A slow march toward recovery has begun, but the uphill nature of that march underscores how important it is that communities continue to come together to support each other as well as the locally owned businesses that make towns and cities so unique. Consumers who want to help the local businesses in their community rebound and thrive in the months and years ahead can show their support in various ways.

- **Take charge of your to-go order.** Convenience became the name of the game when ordering food during the pandemic. Curbside pickup service was offered as a safety measure, and many restaurants that never previously offered delivery or takeout started to do so to generate revenue at a time when in-person dining was limited if not disallowed. Some restaurants began offering delivery through apps like Grubhub or Uber Eats, and though that may be



convenient for diners, restaurants must pay a fee to utilize those apps. In lieu of ordering through a third party delivery service, consumers can take charge of their to-go orders and pick up the food themselves. That saves restaurants the delivery app surcharge, allowing them to increase net profits on the meals they sell.

- **Continue to be loyal.** A recent study from researchers at the Harvard Business School found that a customer's eighth purchase was an average of 80 percent higher than his or her first purchase. That highlights just how valuable repeat customers are to small businesses. Consumers who have had positive experiences with small businesses in their communities in the past can continue to support those companies by looking to them first when they need new products or services. Doing so not only helps small businesses retain more customers, but it increases the likelihood that consumers will again have positive buying experiences.
- **Share experiences via social media.** Small businesses recognize the value of social media. A 2021 survey from Visual Objects found that 74 percent of small businesses in the United States are active on their social media accounts at least once each week. Social media can become even more valuable to small businesses when their customers utilize such platforms to share positive experiences and encourage their friends and neighbors to patronize local businesses.

Consumers can take various steps to support small businesses in their communities as such establishments look to regroup and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shop small businesses to improve the holiday experience

It's the time of year when newspapers thicken with sales circulars and holiday advertisements. Consumers looking to beat the hustle and bustle and steer clear of the crowds this year may want to pay attention to local businesses in lieu of trekking to nearby shopping malls.

Every time consumers visit local coffee shops to grab a latte, pick up a dress at a nearby boutique or patronize a farmer's market down the street, they are supporting a small business. The Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving are some of the busiest shopping days of the season, and they also can be some of the friendliest to small businesses.

Plaid Friday was conceptualized in Oakland. It may have been born in the Golden State, but the movement soon spread across the country. Plaid Friday is an alternative to big box stores' Black Friday bonanzas. It is designed to promote both local and independently-owned businesses during the holiday season. The name Plaid Friday was used to help people visualize the various threads of small businesses coming together to create a strong community fabric that was diverse and creativity.

Shoppers can continue their small business patronage with Small Business Saturday. This, too, is a counterpart to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. The first event was created by American Express in conjunc-

tion with the nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation. Since its inception, many small business groups, merchants and politicians have touted the event and the Shop Small® mantra. The idea is that when small businesses thrive, communities and individuals thrive along with them.

The Small Business Administration says that, since 1995, small businesses have generated 66 percent of all new jobs in the United States. There are a number of big reasons to shop small. One can start around the holidays and then continue all year long.

- Shopping small businesses helps give back to the community directly. According to Civic Economics, a strategic planning business, on average 48 percent of each purchase made at independent businesses is recirculated locally through tax money and other support.
- Small business owners often strive to provide personalized, hands-on customer service. Repeat business is key to their survival, so they want to ensure shoppers are happy.
- Small businesses, since they are not beholden to corporate oversight in terms of what they sell, have greater flexibility. That allows them to offer a diverse product selection.
- Small business owners often live nearby, and they're the people you see in town,



Specific events are geared to direct shopping traffic to local businesses during the holiday season.

schools and elsewhere in the local community. Many consumers are comforted to know they're supporting their neighbors, especially during the holiday season.

Supporting local businesses is easy. And shoppers who like what they see can share the good news with others on social media.

5 ways to support small businesses this holiday shopping season

Small businesses long have been the heart and soul of local communities. There is something to be said about being on a first-name basis with a local restaurateur or another small business owner, as such familiarity often translates into exemplary service.

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses account for 99.9 percent of companies in the country, due in large part to the broad definition of small businesses (those with fewer than 500 employees). However, the vast majority of businesses in the United States have a staff that's smaller than 20 workers, according to the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council. These firms employ nearly 60 million workers, says the SBA.

Despite the prevalence of small businesses, fewer than 80 percent of entrepreneurial small business ventures make it beyond their first year, and only around half make it beyond five years.

Consumers who want to help their favorite small businesses survive can use the holiday season and beyond to set the course for success. Consumers can make a concerted effort to fuel this important cog in their local economic engines.

- **Shop local.** The concept is simple but effective. Opting to shop in local stores over larger conglomerates and franchises can help small businesses take root. Before making holiday shopping lists, visit local stores and base gift ideas on items they have in stock. Chances are those gifts will be one-of-a-kind.
- **Purchase gift cards/certificates.** All businesses have slow periods, and post-holidays is often a time when sales stagnate. Gift cards may bring new customers into local businesses who might otherwise not have patronized them, potentially creating new repeat customers.
- **Cater holiday meals and gatherings.** The holiday season is chock-full of entertainment opportunities. Individuals can rely on nearby restaurants and other food and beverage businesses to cater holi-



day parties. Some businesses also may be willing to discount or donate food for non-profit group activities, such as church holiday bazaars, school holiday concerts or fundraising fairs.

- **Mention small businesses on social media.** The holiday season breeds excitement. Therefore, when shoppers are in local stores, they can snap pictures of products and overflowing shopping bags and post them online while praising local businesses.
- **Think about subscription gifts.** Enrollment in a health club or a massage therapy service are gifts that keep on giving for the recipient, but also help ensure consistent incoming cash for the business providing the service.

When shopping this holiday season, consumers can look to the small, local businesses in their communities that help make towns and cities unique.

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Building connections

When you're in the doors of a locally owned business, you can ensure that you'll be treated to top-tier customer service.

The experts in charge of the shop must be well-versed in their product to remain competitive against other retailers, and their professionalism shows. If you want to feel respected and have all your questions answered, shopping locally is a safe bet. Especially if you're new to the area, the local knowledge can be a significant contributor to finding your way around. As you shop, start a conversation about your recent move and ask about the community. Someone excited about your visit will be more willing to make personal time and share hidden gems around the neighborhood that are also locally owned.

Here are some other excellent ways to familiarize yourself with small business owners and contribute to their operation by committing to shop locally.



Meet unique characters
As you navigate a locally owned store or restaurant, you will begin trusting the owners and employees with their expertise.

You may also notice that a relationship with other regulars will build over your like-minded views. Try to be open to new experiences and rubbing shoulders with others

who frequent the businesses. Having a vast network of unique characters in your life can open the door to unexpected opportunities.

Know where your items come from
It's a good idea to understand precisely where your products are coming from and how they are acquired. For instance, when purchasing items that aren't built with quality, you risk buying something that won't last or crafted with unethical materials or practices.

You should also understand how the groceries you use to feed your family are harvested. Local vendors are more likely to purchase their meats and vegetables from hometown farmers who run their operation without harsh treatment to animals and limit pesticides.

Order custom goods
When you can't find what you're looking for locally, ask an employee if they can special order the item. Many vendors can pull inventory from partners across the country or custom create the product that fits your needs. If you're not in a hurry, avoid ordering from a big-box e-commerce website to keep your money at home and support your local businesses.

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