

Shops want buyers to think 'local'



BUYING LOCAL: Kelsey Rydland (left) gets help with a new pair of shoes from Fairhaven Runners employee Tess Wolken Wednesday at the Fairhaven business. Rydland says he runs two to three miles daily. *PETE KENDALL HERALD PHOTO*

Aubrey Cohen, The Bellingham Herald

Polly Favinger, the apparel manager at Fairhaven Runners, watched Diana Shenk walk through the store in stocking feet before lacing up a pair of running shoes Wednesday afternoon, then took her outside.

"Before we put something else on, let's just watch you run in these," Favinger said.

Shenk ended up running up and down 11th Street in three different pairs of shoes, then bought the second pair.

Such service is just one of the benefits that locally owned stores offer, according to business owners and shoppers.

To highlight those advantages and encourage people to shop at locally owned stores, a local group has launched a "Think Local - Buy Local - Be Local" campaign, with the first countywide "Think Local - Buy Local - Be Local Day" on Saturday.

Many advantages

Locally owned businesses keep more money in the county, give more to nonprofit groups, contribute to unique local character and provide more local jobs, according to Sustainable Connections, the local business network behind the new effort.

List of stores

Visit www.thinklocal.org for details on the "Think Local - Buy Local - Be Local" campaign, including a list of participating stores.

"Too often, folks don't understand the connection between their quality of life and the choices they make through purchases," said Michelle Long, the network's executive director.

Fairhaven Runners owner Steve Roguski said shoppers need to consider more than just price. In addition to keeping money in the community and contributing to community character, Fairhaven Runners offers extra customer service and hosts events like runs, walks and talks, he said.

Kathy Van Winkle, manager at Griggs Stationers, acknowledged that big office-supply stores often have lower prices because they buy in large volume and sell some things below cost to attract customers. But they are not always cheaper, she said.

"We can be very competitive on some items," she said.

Also, Griggs has other services like special deliveries, same-day delivery and no minimum on most special orders, she said.

Cheryl Giles, who bought a calendar at Griggs Wednesday morning, said she buys at locally owned stores because it keeps money in the community and because she sees a difference in the service.

"I can go to Hardware Sales and ask a question and people can answer my question," she said.

After buying a pair of shoes at Fairhaven Runners Wednesday afternoon, Kelsey Rydland said he was going to buy online, but changed his mind.

"I think the extra five bucks or 10 bucks that you spend is worth it," he said. "I think Fairhaven could use the money more than Amazon."

Ongoing effort

More than 20 local businesses and groups are sponsoring the new effort, with more than 130 businesses participating. For \$20, businesses get posters, a window decal, a tip sheet and "thank you" cards for customers.

On Saturday, shoppers at the stores can get fliers for a "shop local" game with gift certificates as prizes.

Roguski said he hopes the campaign will remind people who already want to buy local of the advantages of doing so, and maybe bring in some new shoppers.

"It's hard to say if the effect will be that far-reaching," he said. "We certainly hope to extend the argument further than people who already recognize the value of shopping local."

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