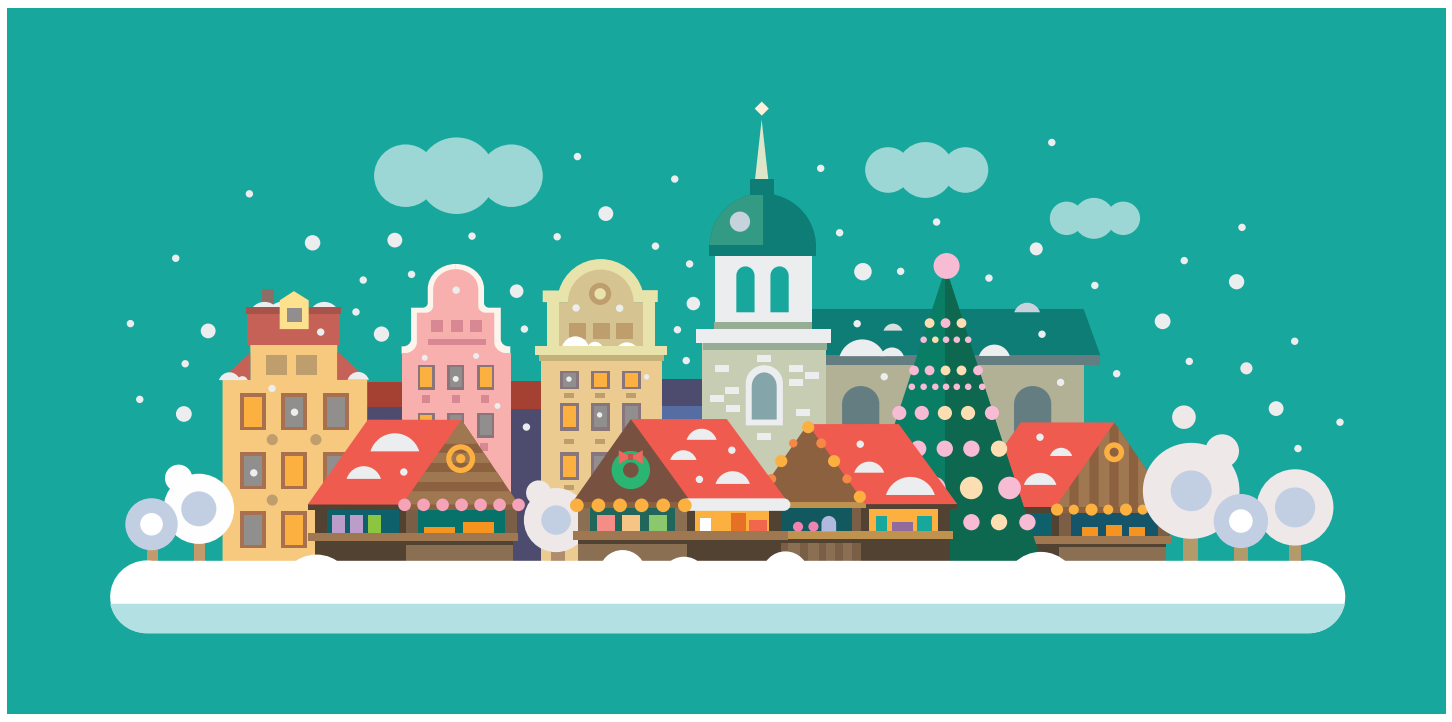
Why shopping local matters



It's easy to forget that shopping local helps your community and state in many, many ways. From tax dollars to supporting mom-and-pop businesses, the benefits are myriad.

Spend local and more stays local

Numerous studies have analyzed the way money recirculates, and most agree that money spent locally has a much higher chance of staying in the community.

A study commissioned by the British Columbia division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees found that for every $1 million in sales, independent retail stores generate $450,000 in local economic activity, compared to just $170,000 for chains. Among restaurants, the figures are $650,000 for independents and $300,000 for chains. Across both sectors, this translates into about 2.6 times as many local jobs created when spending is directed to independent businesses instead of chains. The study concludes that a shift of just 10 percent of the market from chains to independents would produce 31,000 jobs paying $940 million in annual wages to workers.

more stable jobs

Economists at Yale University and the University of Bristol found that in times of high unemployment, small businesses both retain and create more jobs than large firms. During the recession of March 2008 to March 2009, the employment growth rate of large employers fell 1.65 percent more than the growth rate of small employers, compared with the previous year. In every other recession and recovery period in the study's sample, large firms took years to recover relative to small firms.

It's better for the community

A study by a professor at Baylor University found strong positive relationships between local ownership, firm size and employee loyalty, which they refer to as organizational commitment. Using data from a nationally representative public opinion survey, the study found that 57.2 percent of small firm workers scored in the highest commitment category, compared to 40.5 percent of large firm workers. They found a similar relationship for ownership, with 56 percent of workers at locally owned firms having high commitment scores, compared with just 38.7 percent of workers at non-locally owned firms. When the researchers plotted the scores on a 16-point commitment scale, the authors found that, together, the two civic measures accounted for as much as a 1.7 point increase in organizational commitment, effects.

Connect Locally

It might seem like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting, but hitting downtown to do some shopping really can help put you in the Christmas spirit and provide a deeper connection with your local surroundings.

Most towns decorate the downtown streets, and many shops do holiday-themed window displays to attract shoppers. Yes, you should spend some money while you're out (it helps the local economy, after all), but just hitting the streets to do some window shopping is a great way to bond with your family and friends during Christmas.

Hit the streets

When you're ramping up your Christmas shopping strategy, set aside a Saturday, or afternoon, to park (or walk, if you're close enough) into your closest shopping district and start exploring. You might find a store you've never seen, or at least make an effort to visit a store you don't frequent very often. It's a great chance to look for unique gifts, while also getting to know your own town a little bit better.

Make it a family bonding experience

Even if you don't actually pick up any gifts while the kids (or spouse) are with you, hitting the local stores to scout out gift options is a great way to just spend some time with your family. Tell your kids stories about unique finds in the antique store, or let them make a list of gift options while perusing the aisles at a downtown general store.

If you're shopping for adults, it can also give you a chance to glance into local downtown boutiques. It just feels like Christmas Walking the streets in downtown, with a chill in the air in November or December, as the Christmas lights twinkle around the street lights and in the windows, just feels quintessentially Christmas. It evokes the visuals and emotions from classic holiday films like Miracle on 34th Street, and is just a great tradition to add to the Christmas season.