

Support Small Businesses this Holiday Season

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Sen. Smith writes about Small Business Saturday and the many different ways Wisconsinites can support their neighbors and local businesses this holiday season.

EAU CLAIRE - Over the last ten to fifteen years, we've seen an amazing resurgence of entrepreneurs and small home-grown businesses. Something seems to have occurred to make us realize that fun and quality shopping isn't necessarily in malls. Sure, it's still pretty fascinating that so many stores can be under one roof, but something was always missing. It was the personal identity of a small business—going into a shop that you won't find in every city and every mall. That small business that only exists in your town. That shop owned by your own neighbor.

Whether it's a unique restaurant or a boutique, if it's one-of-a-kind, it is special. It just makes me smile thinking of the now flourishing main streets that had once been written off—seeing people walking the sidewalks, enjoying the day and helping the local economy.

If there is an economic driver for any local community; it's entrepreneurship. Of course, some locally-started businesses grow so they have multiple locations, but they're still part of your

community. This is where it all begins and it's something we can be proud of.

There are some really common places to find small businesses to support. Farmers' markets have become popular everywhere, for instance. It's a great place to find goods that are fresh and grown within just a few miles of the spot you buy it.



One of the most noticeable growths in Wisconsin has taken place in the local breweries. It's not just your corner tavern anymore, but now you can choose from one of the dozens of taps that were brewed right there in the same locale. Often, the choices change with the season or even week to week. Wineries have also found a home in western Wisconsin. You can drive through the field where the grapes are harvested and walk into the shop to taste amazing homegrown wine.

When you're shopping for unique gifts, you can't beat the locally produced goods sold in main street shops. So many talented people all around you produce beautiful jewelry, wood-turned bowls, artwork and so much more.

To showcase the talent and amazing local options, Small Business Saturday was embraced as an alternative to Black Friday. This year, on November 27, you should consider spending your day and holiday money supporting your local businesses. It's a great way to show support to your neighbors and keep your money working in the community. It can be a nice feeling knowing that your dollars stay in western Wisconsin. Talk about paying it forward.

Small Business Saturday was created by a major credit card company. They obviously recognized the opportunity as more people were stepping away from big box stores. Now, credit

card companies even register small businesses across the country to help highlight them for the holiday season. Everyone is on board for small business.

Even though there is just one dedicated day to supporting small businesses I want to remind you that they're here every day. Your hardworking neighbors keep the economic gears turning year-round so their community can thrive. From retail to service industry, small business needs you as much as you need them. That includes your local artists and your local repair shops.



As someone who worked, managed and owned a small service business for most of my life, I can tell you the reward is great, though the work is hard. Owning, working and supporting small businesses develops community and forms lifelong bonds. I know I will always be attached to the folks I worked with and for. That's the spirit of local small business.

You can share in that special feeling of community when you visit local businesses in your community. Take your time to get to know who works there. Listen to their stories. It's worth it. You may grow your circle of friends even in a time when we've faced so much adversity. Get out, enjoy and share.

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