

BUYING LOCAL MAKES EVEN MORE SENSE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

For most retailers (and this includes many restaurants and personal service businesses), sales during the period from mid-November through the end the December each year represents around forty percent of the total annual sales for these types of businesses. To say that this all important seven week period is “bread and butter” time for most retailers is not in any way an exaggeration. The sales volume (or lack thereof) experienced during this period will at least influence – if not determine - how most retailers will operate in the coming year. For many that fail to achieve the customary sales volume during the holiday season, the question of whether such a business can continue as a going concern very far into the new year must quickly be answered and addressed.

In any normal year, there are always many retail enterprises that post favorable sales numbers and others that fall far short of what is needed to keep the doors open very far into the first quarter. Such is the natural evolution of the marketplace. But this is not in any way a normal year.

Some retail analysts are predicting that the United States will see retail failures during the first half of 2009 at rates not experienced in generations because of the deepening national recession. If this prediction comes true, Pensacola and probably downtown will likely not be spared. For our downtown and our community, the departure of any of our locally owned retailers would be felt far more severely than by a temporarily empty storefront.

In Downtown Pensacola, more than 90% of the retailers and restaurants are locally owned enterprises that provide a significant amount of support for the projects and offerings that help define Pensacola’s quality of life. Whether the support is in the form of a sponsorship for a local little league team, buying an advertisement in a high school yearbook, purchasing season tickets to the symphony, making a donation to a church silent auction, or scores of other similar “contributions” made by local businesses, the results are the same. Local businesses support the local causes that are important to local people. Losing even one of our locally owned independent businesses diminishes the resources that are available for advancement and continuation of the civic, religious, charitable, and cultural offerings that we expect to find in Pensacola. There is a lot more at stake during this important selling season than in recent years.

When we make decisions about where and what to purchase this holiday season, we should all pause and think about where our dollars go after the purchase and what they are used for after the transaction is complete. Is that sales tax we save on an Internet purchase really equal to the loss of support for our local institutions? How much do the retailers in the next county contribute to support the causes that are important to us in Pensacola? By giving gifts from local businesses, the money we spend changes hands here in Pensacola several times before any of it leaves our area. In these times of financial uncertainty where caution seems to guide our every expenditure, please remember that the successes of locally owned independent businesses are directly related to the success of so many cherished Pensacola institutions.

Picking out that perfect gift from a local retailer will likely ensures the survival of much more than just that business. Buying locally always make good sense. But this holiday season, doing so seems brilliant.

Franklin D. Kimbrough
Executive Director