

Dec 02

## Shop Locally – Think Globally

For several months, I have been struck by a sense of widespread disenfranchisement that many people seem to be feeling in reaction to political and corporate events. We appear to be living in some kind of bizarre world, where the behavior of our government and business leaders are not helping but rather are contributing to the severity of local and global tribulations.

The question I pose to you, my fellow citizen, is how will we deal with the issues we must face if current economic and political trends continue? The easy and most likely path is to do nothing, to maintain our relatively comfortable lifestyles, until we cannot avoid perceiving some kind of horrific ongoing calamity.

When the health of large enough numbers of people in the West is at risk, the response will be some kind of government mandated behavior. Conversely, we can try to anticipate problems and envision long-term solutions that rely primarily on individual actions. To maintain individual liberty, I believe that we need to act sooner rather than later.

Many people who travel abroad say that the catastrophic scenario is already unfolding. Commonly touted economic theory says that economic based problems can best be solved through “free” markets, through increased global trade, and by introducing American style capital markets. My review of the results of the past 22 years of American directed global economic development leads me to believe that this is not true.

While some small percentage of the world’s population has moved into the middle class, most global citizens and certainly much of the world’s ecosystems have suffered. Recently, this newspaper featured an article about the Santa Fe Independent Business-Citizen Alliance. The Alliance was formed to help people find a concrete way of doing something so as to help address some of the troubles illustrated daily in the media.

Many people have contacted me about the organization, which is part of a nationwide effort to improve the quality of life in local communities. The buy local movement believes that individuals, acting in concert with their principles and desire for quality of life for people everywhere, will be willing to vote on a daily basis with their shopping dollars

Given the disparity of wealth locally, as well as globally, it is especially important that any buy local effort benefits people who were born and raised in Santa Fe who exist on the lower end of the economic spectrum. The rest of this column is therefore devoted to providing answers to the some of the most frequently asked questions about the Santa Fe Independent Business-Citizen Alliance.

### **Why should I care who owns or manages the businesses I patronize?**

Compared to chain stores, locally-owned businesses recycle a higher percentage of their revenues and profits back into the local economy. It is estimated that local business create 50% more jobs than national retailers, and the jobs created by local businesses tend to pay higher wages and give better benefits.

**What's in it for me?** Many local businesses that display the Alliance logo, (picture of the Earth from outer space set within a New Mexico sun sign) will be giving discounts to Alliance members. In addition, some portion of the money spent in locally-owned and managed stores by Alliance members will come back to the community in the form of providing sustainable business opportunities for those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder.

**What is an example of my money coming back to the community?** One alternative being pursued is helping people who cannot afford to buy a computer gain access to the Internet. Businesses would recycle older computer equipment that is still good for personal use and get a tax deduction. Citizens would get free computers along with assistance in setting up the computers. Your shopping at an Alliance business would fund a community group set up to provide computer technical help to improve the life of a fellow Santa Fean.

**Why are prices often higher at local businesses?** Some local businesses have to charge more for their products because they pay their local suppliers and hourly employees more than big discounters. If local businesses chose to buy mainly through national sources, additional local people would lose their jobs. Many national stores ask employees to work on a part-time basis, without benefits, which increases the burden on local social service agencies. We need to be willing to consider paying more up front, so that later on, we all have a higher quality of life.

**Why should I support local businesses if it costs more?** Santa Fe is an economically divided community with pockets of great wealth and poverty. In a small town that also serves as the state capital, we can serve as an example to the rest of the state. If middle and upper income people sacrifice a few dollars to support local businesses, then unemployed and underemployed people will benefit.

**Do I need to believe in all of the principles of the Alliance in order to join?** There are seven basic principles: Support other locally-owned and managed businesses; bank and invest locally; reduced unnecessary consumption and waste; support the Living Wage movement; help restore health to the environment; promote genuine campaign finance reform; and end tax exemptions for commercial enterprises.

Most businesses will not be able to implement these principals immediately nor completely, just like all of us as consumers find buying from multi-national corporations necessary and shopping at chain stores compelling at times. The Alliance is made up of people who want to acknowledge and support each other in public and who share an intention to take some kind of action in accordance with these principles.

**How much does it cost to join?** The minimum contribution is \$1, though \$50 is the suggested amount. Citizens and business owners are encouraged to pay what they think is appropriate.

**How can I contact the Alliance?** The email address is [SFIBCA@Yahoo.com](mailto:SFIBCA@Yahoo.com), and the telephone number is 992-3465. Beginning in January, our website will be [www.santafealliance.com](http://www.santafealliance.com). Brochures and membership forms are available upon request.

**How do local businesses benefit local people?** The high level of poverty in New Mexico and attendant levels of domestic violence and DWI all point to a lack of economic opportunity. Locally-owned businesses that are members of the Alliance are asked to support the Living Wage movement. This means that private employers, along with the city of Santa Fe, would raise the minimum wage to \$8.50 an hour by the middle

of next year. The goal is to make sure that everyone can make a decent living for themselves and one child by working 40 hours a week.

**What do businesses get out of the Alliance?** In addition to generating more customers, the Alliance offers group purchasing and advertising opportunities. Businesses also receive individual membership cards for all their employees.

**How do businesses decide whether to give discounts?** Member businesses decide based on their own judgment what their level of contribution back to the community will be and what discount to offer Alliance members. Business owners have an opportunity to suggest and vote on projects they would like to see supported by their community donations.

**Can big corporations join the effort?** If a big company is willing to commit to pay living wages, makes a conscious effort to buy supplies locally, agrees to forgo using their money to influence the political process, and tries to reduce waste and use of energy to transport items, they would be welcome to join the Alliance efforts.

Santa Fe has a choice. We can move towards becoming another bland, commercialized, and divided town where gated communities, private security services, and chain stores are prominent features. Or, the City Different can remain unique, beautiful, open to new cultural expressions. Our future depends in part on how we vote with our shopping dollars. We live in a nation and a world that has increasing numbers of desperately poor, sick and frustrated people. If and how we share our accumulated wealth as a community will determine the kind of town and world we bequeath to our grandchildren.

Rob Rikoon is an investment advisor and armchair activist. The views expressed herein are his own. For more information on supporting sustainable community and the newly formed "Santa Fe Independent Business-Citizen Alliance", contact Rob at [rrikoon@aol.com](mailto:rrikoon@aol.com) or 989-3581.