

Miracle on 25th Street

After Thanksgiving, I was searching for some gift ideas. A good friend who is an accomplished shopper suggested buying some gift cards from 25th Street merchants. This led me to revisit a column I wrote four years ago encouraging Christmas shoppers to purchase a few of their gifts from local merchants. Given current economic conditions, I thought it would be a good time to revisit the topic.

In my original column, I mentioned more than half a dozen Ogden merchants. I named both long-established Ogden retailers and newly established firms. My hope was that, by putting in a plug for specific retailers, I would direct some business their way. In the course of rereading the piece, I discovered something interesting. All of the retailers mentioned in the original article are still in business four years later.

In light of the struggling economy, this is a miraculous accomplishment. Based upon national patterns, approximately half of the new businesses and at least one of the established firms would have been expected to fail during the four-year period. The fact that none of the retailers failed suggests that Ogdenites are doing a tremendous job of supporting local businesses.

Ogden residents should take pride in their support of local businesses. Why is buying locally something praise-worthy?

First, shopping at locally owned businesses rather than national chain stores means that more money stays in the community.

Specifically, it has been estimated that 73 percent of the dollars spent with local merchants stays with the local economy, while only 43 percent of the dollars spent with chain stores stays in the local economy.

In economic terms, this means that buying from local retailers not only helps

the retail sector, but it also spills over to many other sectors of the economy.

Apart from the economic benefit, local businesses also shape the character of the community.

Several years ago, Utah's public television station KUED produced a series of programs featuring interviews of Utah residents reminiscing about their home towns in the 1950s. The video, titled "Ogden in the '50s," was largely defined by recollections of the retailers found on 25th Street and Washington Boulevard. The fact that Ogden residents were more likely to remember local retailers than city elections or local political scandals demonstrates the degree to which local businesses

define a community.

Finally, it is worth noting that people are increasingly viewing shopping locally as the "green" way to shop because it reduces the impact on the environment. The Sierra Club has compiled a large list of reasons why shopping locally leaves a smaller footprint on the environment than shopping at national big-box stores. The cited benefits of local shopping range from walkable downtown areas to reducing the blight that occurs when big-box stores are abandoned.

Despite the benefits of buying locally, it is unrealistic to expect a large number of consumers to completely avoid national retailers and online merchants. All but the most dedicated will find their way to Target or Walmart. A great many will purchase something online.

However, small steps do help. Everyone should be able to purchase some Christmas gifts from local retailers. If nothing else, one can do as my friend suggested and purchase a gift card from a local merchant. Doing so will increase the likelihood that the Ogden retailers operating today will be here in the future.

Top of Utah Voices



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Commentary

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