

# Community Challenge | Why buying local matters

###### Written by

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**Nov. 24, 2013 5:51 PM**

 Eight years ago, I was having lunch with Summer Auerbach of Rainbow Blossom Natural Food Markets. We had worked together on lots of projects in the nonprofit and for-profit world, and she was getting involved with a new project that she was very excited about: the Louisville Independent Business Alliance. So that’s where the Keep Louisville Weird stickers were coming from!

I asked her what in the world she was talking about. I could understand wanting to promote her own business, but what was the deal with a group of independent business owners getting together to say “buy local”? What kind of public good was this serving?

First, she told me about a study that showed significantly more money stays circulating in the local economy when spent at an independent business. That was a surprise, but it made sense to me right away: All the owners and employees are here, and they purchase from many other local businesses for services like accounting, legal, printing, etc.

Then she asked where I take my traveling friends while they are in town. As I ticked through my list, I noticed they were all local, independent businesses. These were all businesses that can’t be found in any other town besides my very own.

Lunch was over, but the message stuck. I started paying more attention to where I was making my purchases and seeking out the locals who could offer me a unique experience. Three years later I started working for the organization.

The Louisville Independent Business Alliance’s ­(LIBA) message is simple but has a lot of layers. Our slogans are “Keep Louisville Weird” and “Buy Local First.” You may notice it is not “Buy Local Always” because we realize chains and franchises have a place in the world. But we are asking people to think of themselves as citizens rather than consumers when they are making purchasing decisions. Every dollar we spend is a vote for the type of community we want to have.

Just last year, LIBA worked with the American Booksellers Association to commission a study from Civic Economics that showed for every $100 spent at a locally owned independent business in Louisville, $55 is reinvested locally, whereas only $14 is reinvested when that same money is spent at a national chain. A market shift of just 10 percent from chains to independents would retain an additional $416 million in the regional economy every year.

A wide variety of independent businesses, each serving their customers’ tastes, creates greater overall choice for all of us. Not only do independent businesses employ more people directly per dollar of revenue, they also are the customers of local printers, accountants, wholesalers, farms, attorneys, etc., expanding opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Small businesses donate more than twice as much per sales dollar to local nonprofits, events and teams compared to big businesses. They also generate more tax revenue per sales dollar.

This holiday season, LIBA is offering another great reason to buy local: You could win a $1,000 shopping spree at our member businesses. Our Shift Your Shopping Contest is underway and the rules are easy: Collect receipts from five member businesses by Jan. 6, 2014, mail in or present the receipts at one of our sponsor sites (Highland Cleaners or Feeders Supply), and you’ll be entered into the drawing to win $1,000 in gift certificates to LIBA businesses. (Once receipts are verified, they are returned to the owner.) The winner will get to choose from close to 600 ­LIBA businesses where they wish to spend their $1,000.

Many small businesses will be celebrating **Small Business Saturday** on Nov. 30. You can spend the day shopping with a neighborly, community-minded approach to thoughtful gift giving. Mayor Greg Fischer and Congressman John Yarmuth will also be on hand at Westport Village, 1315 Herr Lane, at 10:30 a.m. to make remarks and help our sponsors give away swag and prizes.

For more information on the Shift Your Shopping Contest and an entry form, visit [www.keeplouisvilleweird. com/shiftyourshopping](http://www.keeplouisvilleweird.com/shiftyourshopping).

(If you’re part of an independent business and would like to become a member of LIBA, we’d love to have you! Visit [www.keep­louis­ville­weird.com/join](http://www.keeplouisvilleweird.com/join) to apply.)

<http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2013311250018>