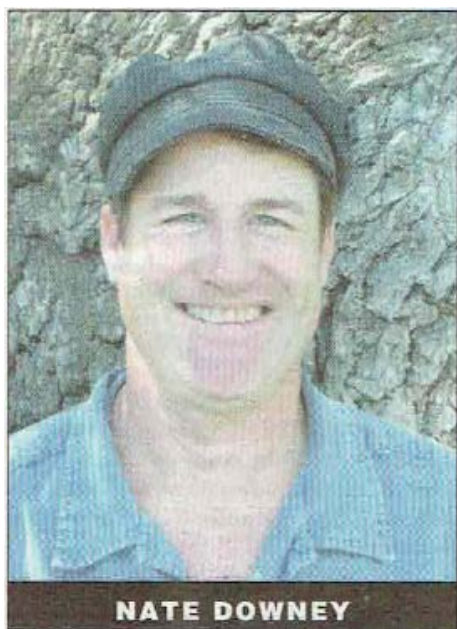


PermacultureinPractice

Local shopping produces ripple effects



One of permaculture's fundamental principles is, "Every essential element in a system should perform more than one function." In permacultural landscape design, for example, we typically do not choose to plant a particular tree species in a precise location merely because the specimen would look pretty. Aesthetics, of course, is extremely important, but an ideal design would include trees that can also provide shade, serve as a windbreak, control erosion, fix nitrogen in the soil, create privacy screening, initiate some noise abatement, introduce wildlife habitat, invite beneficial insects, increase a property's monetary value, or provide an important product such as firewood or food.

Quite obviously, the essential element in any local economy is money. For this reason, permaculturalists and anyone interested in creating sustainable communities would be wise to consider the wide variety of functions that local purchases can make.

Whenever we spend our hard-earned cash on products and services that are provided by non-local companies, a significant percentage of that money leaves town. Whenever we make purchases at locally owned establishments, a significant percentage of these transactions stay in the surrounding area to perform many more functions.

The new directory of local businesses published by the Santa Fe Alliance explains that there are five "Great Reasons to Shop with

Locally-Owned, Independent Businesses." Buying local bolsters Santa Fe's uniqueness, keeps tax dollars in town, ensures that independent businesses will remain the City Different's largest employer, empowers business owners who are more "invested" in the future of our community, and helps "our non-profit organizations because they receive their greatest support from locally-owned businesses."

Although these are compelling socio-economic reasons, as the directory explains, they imply extensive, ripple-like effects. Compared to national and international chains, local businesses typically hire and promote a greater percentage of locals and other locally owned businesses, and unlike big-box stores the goods and services that these "independents" purchase are usually sourced locally. Meanwhile, from an ecological perspective, such transactions also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions due to the shorter distances that the products must travel.

In order to further increase these effects during the holiday season, the Alliance is promoting an online gift catalogue at www.santafealliance.com. Here, with a couple quick clicks of your mouse, you can shop locally from the comfort of your own home. Thirty local businesses are represented in the catalogue with products ranging from clothing, hats, and shoes to specialty soaps, chocolates, kitchen utensils, and jewelry.

"It's tempting this time of year to avoid the crowds and colder weather by surfing the internet for gifts," says executive director Vicki Pozzebon. "By providing an extremely convenient way to support locally-owned businesses, the Alliance's online catalogue offers a key that can 'unchain' Santa Feans from the big box stores and their luring websites."

Here, we find that shopping locally also applies another important principle of permaculture, namely, "Make the least change for the greatest possible effect." With simple, convenient local purchases (either online or down the street), like so many well-placed trees, your dollars can have resounding positive effects on our community's economic landscape.

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