

Cast Down Your Bucket Here

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Daily Eastern News

March 20, 2007

In 1895 the great American Booker T. Washington cajoled members of his community to “cast down your bucket where you are” instead of seeking labor or employment somewhere else. Likewise, I firmly believe that more can be accomplished for the benefit of our community by casting our talents and our dollars where we live by buying and producing locally, as well as abandoning the “there’s nothing I can do” attitude.

The real problem is not a lack of business or services, the problem is the complainers who, when it comes down to it, do nothing to prevent businesses from leaving and whose solution to the problems they see is to uproot and leave, or spend their dollars elsewhere, convinced that nothing can be done.

For a community to be successful all the members of that community need to act together to bring the kind of entertainment, businesses, and recreation they want to see, as well as support those facilities already in existence.

Supporting local businesses means using your dollars like votes in favor of the businesses you want to remain in town. Every dollar you spend contributes to the revitalization of the community. According to a December 2002 study by *Civic Economics*, spending \$100 at a chain bookstore generated \$13 in local economic activity, while spending the same amount at a locally owned bookstore generated \$45 in local economic activity. This is because local stores pay higher wages, spend more money in the community, and keep their profits in town.

If you wish to see a more viable and diverse local economy, cast your dollars at locally owned stores instead of national retailers. According to a 2005 study of 1,749 counties conducted by the University of Missouri, an average of 4 small, 1 midsized, and 1 large retail store shuttered in each county within 5 years of the arrival of a Wal-Mart. Furthermore, Wal-Mart reduced average earnings between .5 and .9 percent, which means less money spent in the community. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 84 percent of Wal-Mart sales comes at the expense of local businesses.

Locally owned businesses positively affect city revenue. According to a July 2002 report by Tischler & Associates, local retail stores annually generate an average of \$326 in tax revenue per 1,000 square feet of store space, while national chain stores engender an annual deficit of \$468.

Those who refuse to put their money where their mouth is do not deserve to complain when they see the dozens of shuttered businesses in their town or city. Study after study has shown that every dollar you spend does matter. If you wish to see a viable economy, cast down your bucket where you are!