

Buy Local?

It's always amazing how often groups like the DDA or city government or the downtown Chamber come up with ideas that they claim as original and their own yet those same things have been done before. Sometimes repeatedly.

"Buy Local" is being presented as the greatest thing, the greatest new idea, since sliced bread.

Not even close.

Every political campaign involving city offices includes a plan to encourage residents to buy from local merchants.

In the 2000 campaign for mayor, our approach was "Shop Cheyenne." A little alliteration and a *request* for residents to at least consider buying from a local merchant. "Buy Local" sounds more like an *order* and, of course, people have a right to spend their money wherever they want and if not buying from a local business is their decision, that is their right.

Certainly it would be nice if more local income was spent in town but there are many reasons why it isn't - and can't be.

Cheyenne is very much a secondary market. Its ADI (area of dominant influence) is small so the retail choices are also limited. The only enclosed mall has told shoppers that their children and grandchildren are unwelcome. Why would they expect parents and grand-

parents would then shop the stores in the mall? I won't. Product selection at the mall is also limited with the catalog stores having smaller versions here in Cheyenne and no matter how crammed they make the store, they do not have all items and even all departments one can find in Fort Collins or Denver - even Greeley.

Target is a nice store but its product selection is a mile wide and an inch deep. It is not a modern version of Target - it is not a Super Target. Nor is Kmart.

When a group like DDA or the Chamber implores residents to "buy local," just what does that mean? Non-retail businesses and professionals don't have a reciprocal offering. Does that mean a locally-owned bank (and there are only a couple) should expect the national chains and regional retailers, as well as franchise restaurants and lodging establishments to do business at their bank because *they* buy their socks at Target. Or their ladder at Lowe's. Or eat at Outback.

There are businesses in Cheyenne that want most for residents to "buy local" but they do not buy local themselves. Should they expect any special consideration in that case? Or, if they don't buy what they can and should from a local business, should they stay silent as far as other local residents buying from their store or eating at their



restaurant? Should new car dealers that spend most of their advertising money with foreign owned television and radio stations expect local owners of the WTE, Trader's Shoppers Guide or the Cheyenne Herald to buy their cars from them? Or have their cars serviced with them? Why would we? Why should we?

Fair is fair. Granted that money spent with local businesses does provide income to employees here. But what guarantee is there that those employees will spend their money in Cheyenne just because they earned it here?

The bottom line is that people have a right to spend the money they've earned wherever they choose, be it Cheyenne, Colorado or on-line. If there were a perfect reciprocal program, that might be different. But, there isn't. And at least some, if not most, of the whiners do not spend their money in Cheyenne. They do not buy from local vendors, using the same rationale they want you to use - that spending locally will turn in the economy while buying in Colorado will turn in their economy. And the thought that a "buy local" effort is new or different is laughable. Printing shopping bags to sell to downtown merchants does not constitute a buy local program. Once again, having non-retailers in control of the DDA has greatly damaged the downtown retail market. That won't change with a bag that says "buy local."

Why hasn't the DDA announced their new director? Shouldn't that person be taken around by the current director and introduced to all of her supporters in downtown? To all those who will bust their fannies to help the new person succeed? Oh, that's right, that new DDA director has been a part of the failed downtown. She doesn't need any introduction.

To buy local is, in theory, a good idea. But to expect that of consumers without a matching commitment by businesses to also buy local is unreasonable. It won't happen and shouldn't happen. Local businesses that work hard on attracting and satisfying local buyers are doing well. Those that think others should ring their cash register without effort on their part will fail. And, Dinneen's and Grier's prove the younger generation is less likely to succeed than those before them did.

What more local businesses need to do is give consumers a reason to buy locally. You can see from the new restaurants that open in Cheyenne, local consumers will give them a chance. Often, the crowds for a new franchise place is greater in Cheyenne than almost anywhere else in the country. Residents will spend their earnings locally - *if* a local merchant has what they want or need, is price competitive and treats the customer as though they want their business. But businesses pleading for patronage that don't support local vendors don't deserve that patronage. That's my opinion.

Graffiti on the WTE building near their dock doors. Now what will be their position about graffiti?

As the spread of graffiti in Cheyenne may be approaching an epidemic, there has been no plan developed to stem the spread or deal with the graffiti placed or being placed.

It does not help that a city attorney is puzzled about what can be done. While other cities have tackled the act of property vandalism head on, Cheyenne waits to be told by someone outside the city what to do.

Like airline delays losing luggage don't concern anyone until it's their luggage that was lost, graffiti is considered but a minor annoyance by those who are charged with doing something about it.

Other than being obviously unattractive, are there other worse problems about unremoved graffiti? Of course there are.

Visitors, even locals, consider areas where graffiti is heavy as dangerous. They are uncomfortable going there and are less likely to patronize restaurants or stores in or near such areas. Businesses, whether local owners or those considering expansion or opening a new store in Cheyenne, notice the graffiti and the impression they take away is of a city that doesn't care about itself.

It's interesting that a city like Cheyenne will roust the homeless, often military and/or combat veterans with emotional or

physical problems anytime and anywhere they see them but have no concern for what is more unattractive and absolutely unwarranted, graffiti.

City government and some local property owners justify their lack of concern or action by proclaiming that removal will only be reapplied. But, by making a single call to Casper, they could learn that such is not the case.

Graffiti is placed for various reasons. One is vandalism (which is a crime) with no further motivation. One is marking territory and placing graffiti to make others think it is gang related. Some even consider graffiti "art" and have no other canvas that will get as much attention. So they spray paint your building.

Removal of graffiti - rapid removal - can thwart all of those objectives. But the removal cannot be selective and it cannot be tardy. Taggers will see where their graffiti is ignored and continue to mark on the same property. If their graffiti is cleaned off or painted over almost immediately, what's the point of their putting it up? Locally, they can see that the downtown area is open range. They can paint or draw or mark to their heart's content because there is no program that will remove it. Some private property owners remove graffiti as soon as they see it. Others do not. Included among those who do not are some of the most

vociferous "growthers" in town. They do not grasp that having graffiti remain on *their* property endlessly is not going to encourage many to buy their building or open a store in their building downtown.

Putting a sign in the window of your abandoned dealership that implores other property owners to vote "yes" for an additional ten mills of property tax on their downtown property doesn't prove you support the revitalization and rejuvenation of the area you have vacated. Action speaks louder than signs. Remove the graffiti from your building(s), John Dinneen.

Now, the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle has been tagged. On the north side, by the entrance door to their docks, the wall and pedestrian door both have been marked with graffiti. The tagging occurred around Thanksgiving. It remains. How long before it will be removed? Or will the WTE join the growing list of downtown property owners who have surrendered? If the city attorney does not believe graffiti is a destructive act that should be addressed, why should private property owners? And, public property such as signs and bridge pillars and abutments are easy targets for taggers.

Those are places they can see their tagging remain indefinitely.

Another defense for doing nothing is that

"private property rights" would be impacted if an ordinance were approved requiring removal of graffiti. First, of course, the City could remove graffiti from its own property as an example to others. They don't need an ordinance. They can do that right now. Yesterday. But they just don't care enough to bother. Constitutional rights are most important when you want to avoid doing something.

Let's say the graffiti placed was filthy. By words or illustration. Does an absentee property owner who will never see the filth have a right to allow it to remain? What if it were an ethnic or religious slur? Does the city attorney not know of a way he can force the removal or covering of such words? Come on. A Casper official has told me that few property owners decline their offer to remove or paint over graffiti placed on their properties or refuse to accept the City's offer to pay for the supplies if an owner wants to do it themselves. And even fewer remain holdouts when contacted by a City employee and explain the program and reason to them.

Casper and countless other cities and towns around the country have faced the same problem with unwanted graffiti that scars their properties. They have found a way. Check Portland, Oregon. Owners are given seven days for removal. If not done by then, the City does it and bills the owner. Check Casper. Casper does it at City expense. It's being done.