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{Editor’s Note … please consider the following cutline to the attached photo: “Small Business Saturday (Nov. 30) kicks off the crucial holiday shopping season for local businesses’ success. Twice Baked Pottery owner, Scott Obernberger (above) sits at the pottery wheel of his main street store in downtown Jefferson. He says one-third of his annual out-of-store sales happen between Thanksgiving and New Year’s.” Also attached are headshots of those quoted within the following contributed story.}

**Jefferson County Small Business ‘Eco-System’ Powers Purchases Year-Round
*‘Small Business Saturday’ kicks off crucial annual holiday shopping season***

JEFFERSON, Wis.—November 20, 2024—Small business owner Scott Obernberger came to Jefferson County four years ago seeking a new home for his business. What he found was a county-wide eco-system designed to support small businesses like his Twice Baked Pottery.

Welcomed with open arms, Obernberger said his small business generates much of its success from people shopping locally throughout the year, but especially during the holiday season.

“Small Business Saturday is a great way to ensure we all focus on shopping local every November starting the Saturday after Thanksgiving,” Obernberger said. “We do one-third of our out-of-store sales between Thanksgiving and New Year’s.”

Throughout the rest of the year, he said, many of our local small businesses find dedicated support from municipalities, chambers of commerce, local business owners and Jefferson County among other partners who work year-round to support and grow small businesses.

Since moving to Jefferson County, his out-of-store sales have doubled and he has developed a wholesale business, with 95 stores and a national catalog carrying his pottery.

“The eco-system within Jefferson County allows small businesses to thrive here,” he said.

A former defense attorney who suffered a mini-stroke, Obernberger decided he needed to change his life. At 44, he turned his pottery hobby into a business. He originally opened his store in a different county. After years of underperformance there, he decided to seek out a new location. His search led him to Jefferson County, thanks to the supportive ecosystem here. Thrive Economic Development Corporation, local government officials, chambers and main street associations were instrumental in his move, he said, offering assistance on many levels.

“You can always find a building, but you don't often find governments which understand they exist to help you make your dream possible,” he said.

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**Small Businesses Benefit Communities**

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, small businesses employ nearly half of the American workforce and represent 43.5 percent of America’s GDP. They are a critical part of our economic ecosystem where big businesses and small businesses are vendors, employees, partners, and customers to each other.

Here in Jefferson County, shopping locally has a significant positive impact on local economies and community well-being. When you shop at a local business, a larger portion of your money stays within the community. Multiple sources indicate 65 percent to 75 percent of money spent locally stays within the community.

“Without small business, you lose your hometown feel,” said Jody Purtell, executive director of the Watertown Main Street Program. “Shoppers can find quality and unique products at local retailers and a variety of flavors at local restaurants. When you shop local, you're not just buying a product, you're investing in the heart of your community.”

Purtell offered the following breakdown of how shopping locally impacts communities.

**Job Creation:** Local businesses create jobs within the community, contributing to local employment rates and economic growth.

**Tax Revenue:** Local businesses generate sales tax revenue that funds essential services like schools, roads, and public safety.

**Community Investment:** Local businesses often support local charities, events, and organizations, strengthening the community fabric.

**Unique Products and Services:** Local businesses offer a diverse range of products and services tailored to local tastes and needs.

“Money spent in a community stabilizes the tax base, keeps buildings updated and supports many local organizations,” Twice Baked Pottery’s Obernberger said. "Small towns need small businesses to help keep their downtowns vibrant.”

Shopping locally supports a community’s unique character, offering items that can’t be found in big box stores, he added. It fosters relationships and human connections that online shopping cannot replicate.

“Our small businesses sponsor little league teams, donate gift baskets to local fundraisers and they are backbone of our communities,” said Amy Maresch, executive director of the Jefferson Main Street Association.

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"Supporting local businesses makes our community stronger because small businesses care about what happens within our communities where they operate,” she added. “Jeff Bezos (Amazon) doesn’t care what happens here.”

**Evolution Of Jefferson County’s Small Business Ecosystem**

The Jefferson County economic development story showcases a model of how municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development officials can come together to support and grow small businesses. This collaborative approach not only boosts the local economy but also enhances the community’s character and quality of life.

“One of the most amazing things I’ve seen within the business community in Jefferson County is a willingness to work together to offer help and welcome new business with open arms,” said Megan Cooper, executive director of the Jefferson Area Chamber of Commerce. “Jefferson County is made up of great communities that support their local businesses.”

“With remote work on the rise, small towns in Jefferson County offer a better quality of life, shorter commutes, and a friendlier atmosphere,” Twice Baked Pottery’s Obernberger added. “Community leaders listen and respond, creating an environment where small businesses can thrive.”

Over in Fort Atkinson, Shauna Wessely, Fort Atkinson Area Chamber of Commerce executive director, said she has 350-plus business members and half of those are small businesses.

“There are so many different partners in this ecosystem,” she said. “We sit down with business owners and connect them to the resources they need at the local, county and state levels.”

Collaboration among chamber leaders throughout Jefferson County is one key to determining what’s going on with small businesses and what they need. Chamber leaders tap into each other’s expertise to identify a variety of resources and determine how their expertise and resources can benefit small businesses.

“Collaboration is much stronger than competition and this is a very strong characteristic that business owners will find across Jefferson County,” Wessely said. “There’s something to be said for our business owners who seek to learn about their competitors and celebrate the successes of their competitors. Some of the most vocal business owners in our community are people who celebrate the whole community and the good we have here.”

Raina Severson, who leads Legendary Lake Mills Chamber Mainstreet Organization, views Jefferson County as a special place where people work together.

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“We are all working to come up with new ideas to support and grow small business throughout the county,” Severson said. “Our collaboration continues to grow and enhance the small business ecosystem across the county. I feel lucky to have friends in surrounding communities to work with on behalf of small business owners.”

For more information about how you can shop local this holiday season, and discover all the happenings throughout Jefferson County, visit enjoyjeffersoncounty.com

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