

# local

community, say business owners

by Matt Comer, Q-Notes staff

described straight ally and perennial NC Pride Fest supporter. Ghanem agrees with Wooten — shopping locally brings benefits for both her and customers.

"We have better quality, not just in ingredients, but also quality of production," she says. "We see our customers face-to-face and we aren't operating with cookie-cutter recipes. We can make products to our customers' satisfaction."

Wooten says part of being a local, independent retailer is offering something different.

"If we all owned everything we bought from big box stores, we'd all be the same," he says. "If you want to have places you can go to find things that are different, things that can challenge or surprise you, it is important to shop at an independent retailer who is willing and ready to go out and search for these smaller vendors or unique items or those products not mass produced."

Ghanem refuses to shop at franchise-owned retailers. She thinks Durham locals think and shop similarly. "I think this area in particular is aware of local shops," she says. "Customers know the owner and feel a different relationship with them."

the community. It is a dual responsibility."

With the economic downturn, small business owners and families are taking a hit. Womble says the perception in consignment businesses is that an economic crisis automatically means a boost in business. Womble cautions — that small boost is a double-edged sword.

"With money being tighter you want to find the best bargains and deals and stretch your dollar further than normal," he says, "but then there are other folks who have been laid off and are desperate to sell items from their home just to pay their bills and feed their families."

Working locally, small business owners see first-hand the damage job losses and layoffs have on their family, friends and customers. It's that local relationship that allows Ghanem to treat her customers well, especially in this tough economic climate. "I feel their loss and they feel mine. It is a matter of supporting each other."

Womble says shopping locally first is itself a way to give back to your community.

"If you listen to the news and larger picture of the economic impact, when one person in a white collar industry loses their job, by default another four, five or six people in service or support industries lose their jobs as well," he says. "Every time you support a local business you are underwriting a local economy in ways you don't even see." Wooten, Ghanem and Womble all agree — shopping locally will inevitably lead to better local economies and communities. Instead of seeing your dollar split up and sent off to international vendors, overpaid CEOs and stockholders across the country, you can instead see it split between more locally-

hired employees and small business contributions to community non-profits.

"I'm going to pay local employees and give back to the community by donating to the Crape Myrtle Festival, the AIDS Walk+Ride, local churches for bake sales or silent auctions and civic organizations," Wooten says.

He challenges folks to think long and hard about the last time they heard of Wal-Mart supporting a local charity event or giving back to a local non-profit. "They are trying to sell the largest number of items at the highest profit for their corporate stockholders. For a local business, our stockholders are the community."



John Paul Womble is a long-time community leader and owner of Passage Consignment Shoppe in Raleigh. Like Ghanem, he thinks local community members and business owners can work hand-in-hand to make their local neighborhoods and economies a better place.

"We talk about the importance of supporting the community and taking leadership roles in every area, but it is important for the community not only to support businesses, but for businesses to also support the community," he says. "Some business owners ask, 'Why is the community not supporting me?' but at the same time these businesses aren't supporting

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