

Building Strong Local Economies, One Small Business At A Time

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Senator Smith writes about his experience as a business owner, the importance of shopping local for the holiday season, and Wisconsin's work to lead the nation for utilizing federal relief funds to support small businesses.

BRUNSWICK, WI - I guess you can call me a professional window shopper. For years I worked alongside my father, who founded our window cleaning company in 1954. One of the highlights for me was cleaning storefront windows. It was wonderful to see the unique displays and the twinkling, inviting lights, especially during the holidays.

Small businesses are the backbone of our communities, and I believe the strongest economic driver for local communities is entrepreneurship. One of the highlights of my time in the State Senate has been working with local business owners throughout the 31st Senate District.

Over the last couple of decades, we've seen an amazing resurgence in small home-grown businesses. Flourishing main streets that had once been written off are revitalizing, with people

walking the sidewalks, enjoying the day and invigorating the local economy.



The owners of our local businesses deserve our support so they can continue to contribute to the quality of life in our neighborhoods. The COVID-19 pandemic was hard on our small businesses, and their continued success is crucial to not only our economic recovery but also to the character and uniqueness of our region.

In the wake of the pandemic, Governor Evers and his administration did a great job providing support to small businesses with a multifaceted approach focused on aiding local mom-and-pop shops. In fact, Governor Evers used more of Wisconsin's share of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for business support after the pandemic than any other state according to the Center on Budget Relief and Policy Priorities. From investing in infrastructure to distributing grants directly to small businesses, these investments enabled Wisconsin's economy to come back stronger as we venture out into a post-pandemic world.

We can and should continue this work by supporting infrastructure improvements to make it easier to succeed as a small business in our rural areas. Investments like broadband and road repair provide continuing benefits that help existing business owners and encourage others to pursue their dreams of starting their own companies.

Every year around the holidays, I encourage folks to shop at our local businesses. It's a nice feeling to know that your dollars are staying here in western Wisconsin, supporting the shops and restaurants that are owned by your hardworking neighbors and their families.

Whether it's a charming boutique or a unique local restaurant, our communities' small

businesses provide our main streets with a character and charm that can't be found at chain retailers and shopping malls. When you're shopping for singular gifts, you can't beat the handmade jewelry, artwork and home goods that are produced right here in western Wisconsin.

For loved ones that prefer experiences to physical gifts, it's never been easier to pick up gift cards to local restaurants, breweries and wineries. It's not just your corner tavern anymore – an increasing amount of microbreweries and local wineries have found success in our part of the state. Encouraging your friends and family to treat themselves can sometimes be the greatest gift of all.



As someone who worked, managed and owned a small business for most of my life, I can tell you the work is hard, but the reward is great. Small businesses develop the neighborhoods they serve and help folks form lasting bonds. Many of my lifelong friendships grew out of relationships with coworkers and clients. That's the spirit of local business.

You can share in that special feeling when you visit local businesses in your community. Take your time to get to know the people who work there. Listen to their stories. It's worth it, and you'll come away with a new appreciation of the vibrancy and resiliency of your neighbors.

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