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Columns by Pam Woodyard (2007)

Columnists:



My Words, My World:

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Finding North Raleigh's North Pole

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Red and green are traditional Christmas colors. This year, between rising gas prices and the falling dollar, many of us may see red because we don't have enough green to complete our holiday shopping lists.

Holiday gift-giving has morphed beyond the frankincense, gold and myrrh of biblical times. It has become a complicated, political, consumer-driven activity.

Campaigns urge us to donate to charities in lieu of giving presents. There is also a push to give homemade gifts. I've even heard of "re-gifting" holiday parties as a twist on recycling.

Then there is the standard consumer approach to generously give clothes, electronics, gift cards and fruitcakes.

I was mulling this over as I calculated my own holiday budget. With one eye on my checkbook and the other on my list, an idea came to me. Maybe I could save money, help the environment and the economy by buying locally.

Often that term refers to food purchases, but the American Independent Business Alliance stresses that buying locally can apply to any purchase. There is still a boost to the local economy and positive environmental impact from decreased shipping and transportation.

I decided Triangle Town Center could not count as local. I want to shop true local merchants -- independent business owners in North Raleigh. To supplement the list of local stores I already know, I checked out the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce membership directory. Then, bent on making North Raleigh my North Pole, I started shopping.

First, I contacted Donna Kanich, a North Raleigh resident and local potter, to see what pieces she might have. Not only did she have several items available she also helped me decide which item would be most appropriate for the recipient.

Buying locally has an additional perk of personalized, customer service. I selected a few ornaments for co-workers and moved down the list.

I chose local nurseries for my supply of holiday greenery. Both Homewood Nursery on Honeycutt Road and Atlantic Avenue Orchid and Garden Center offer great plants, supplies and accessories. I found beautiful poinsettias for my parents.

Shopping locally for the kids was easier than I thought. Registration for a Blue Jay Point County Park nature program gives the kids outdoor time with parents. Pre-paid hours at Right Time Kids offers indoor playtime without parents.

I'll admit -- hours at Right Time Kids, a drop-in center, is a gift for me, too, but the kids do love to go there. I also added Learning Rx testing to my list for a young friend, who wants to gain an edge in school. The Learning Rx motto is "give the gift of easier learning."

Right Time Kids and Learning Rx are franchises, but for my purpose that still counts as local.

Finally, I asked a neighborhood seamstress to make a couple of shirts for my husband, but my request was too late to be ready for Christmas. Perhaps better than another shirt is time spent together, so a gift certificate to Raleighwood Cinema Grill can be the local solution.

I suppose dashing around North Raleigh from one local business to another in search of the perfect gift counteracts my saving gas or gas money. But it has been less stressful and more rewarding than fighting for a mall parking space and shuffling through crowded stores to purchase the same "Anywhere, USA" gifts that are likely made in another country altogether.

A politically correct friend asked me why I don't just give homemade gifts and donate to charity. Honestly, I am just not that talented and I consider my local purchases "homemade" gifts in a sense.

As for donations, I think of it as letting the charity begin at home and giving a gift to our local economy. I hope the recipients of my giving, both direct and indirect, will have happy holidays.

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