



WINCHENDON COURIER

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VIEWS

Opinion and commentary from Winchendon and beyond

EDITORIAL

Shop Local Saturday

Isn't it a bit sad we must set aside a special day to make certain we support our local merchants? Was it only 50 years ago or so we wouldn't even have thought to go elsewhere to shop except within our own town? There was everything right here, clothing stores, shoe stores, grocery stores, a butcher, a baker, gift shops, hardware stores, auto dealerships, repair shops, furniture stores...what changed?

A lot, of course.

For one thing, credit.

Do you remember getting the first store credit card? Or a bank credit card? It's been so long ago that for most people it is an automatic thing and it isn't such monumental thing at all. College students have credit cards.

But for the middle class homemaker in 1954 or so, the introduction of the ability to take home a product today and not pay for it immediately was unheard of. At first, it was bigger department stores that introduced the concept; Macy's and Bloomingdale's and Filene's. They set up revolving accounts and introduced the pay as you go plans with minimal payments we are all so used to; and charged very low interest to get people to use them.

People were skeptical.

They were taught not to borrow money. To save until you could pay cash for items, especially big tickets items like appliances. Or couches.

But here was the chance to do it the other way around.

And you could buy a pair of shoes too. And wear them home. And pay later.

Whoa.

Then the banks saw a chance for easy money and drummed up the credit card businesses that spread the ability to use the cards at more than one establishment. Use the same card and buy at several stores. Pay just one place instead of several smaller invoices every month.

Another whoa.

It took a while. The saving generation didn't jump on board all at once. It took their more free spirited children (those '60s wilder children) to really get on the bandwagon. But by the 1970s we all had a wallet full of plastic. Dreamers were predicting a day when paper money would be obsolete.

Along with the demise of paper money went some of the smaller businesses who didn't hop onto the credit card whirlwind (and some still don't). It costs MERCHANTS to use the credit card system too, and smaller businesses do not want to pay the fees involved for the "privilege" of letting you use plastic. So some of the businesses floundered as people sought places where they could use their plastic money rather than their paper money.

Then the end of the '60s and the mid-'70s saw another phenomena begin: big box stores. It isn't all just one big Wally World yet, and they weren't even the beginning; but they quickly took over the countryside. Why oh why would anyone pay full retail at a mom-and-pop clothing store, even if the products are well made, when you can buy three times as many clothes at the big store in the next town, and use a credit card to pay for it?

The clothing stores, shoe stores and smaller groceries were the first to go.

Central Street in Winchendon, Parker Street in Gardner, Main Streets in many towns became a line up of empty buildings as the shoppers deserted them for the bargains in one stop shopping bonanzas.

It won't turn around soon, though the American public is beginning to resent manufacturing done in other countries and sold so cheaply here, and might just seek out artisan and locally sourced items at higher cost just because it is a bit of a quality revolution.

But the days of shopping for everything in smaller businesses is over for the most part, unless Americans in general go back to a cash economy and demand that quality and local control.

In the meantime, we do encourage the Shop Local and Small Business Saturday planned Nov. 29 here in Winchendon. There is a plan to encourage vendors to set up in the town hall auditorium to display wares as well; contact the offices of Economic Development at town hall for information on how to be included in that.

One final note completely in another direction, this Saturday beginning at 11 a.m. there will be an open house to see the new police station. We encourage others to come. Kiwanis will have some hot dogs and chips (while they last, they're free) and a few other surprises will be on hand.

K9 Clyde will be there, you can meet him in person. As a side note, he once again deserves kudos for an incident earlier this week when a child became lost and Clyde was among those who searched for several hours. She was found safe and sound and is home again. Thank you all who helped and who were concerned.

Striving for a higher caliber system

As we move towards the end of the first quarter of the school year, I want to tell you some of the steps we are taking and have taken to move towards

achieving our goal of reaching Level 1 status, beginning with the high school.

First however, in our continuing effort to build pride in our system, we have created the "Blue Devil Cool Award" which recognizes outstanding staff work. The administration team will present the award on a monthly basis. It's important for our staff to understand how much appreciation and respect we have for work which is frequently unseen but should never be unacknowledged.

Academically, we have exciting things happening at the high school and are moving in the right direction to prepare those students for college. We have significantly increased the number of Advanced Placement courses in the last couple years. We now have a seven day period which includes academic support and study halls. No longer do students have to choose between, for example, an additional foreign language and music. Subsequently our numbers rose for for foreign language classes. We've strengthened our math and science programs to meet the changing dynamics of the college application process. Murdock graduates have attended or are attending Harvard, Tufts, Smith, Columbia medical school, Boston University, Northeastern, Ohio State and other top-notch institutions. The high school received a more than \$86,000 grant which enabled us to begin an honors class in computer science. That makes Murdock the only school in the region with such an expansive and extensive computer science program and is a strong selling point in this era of school choice. Put it this way: every year some 35,000 new jobs are created in the technology field with several thousand of those right here in Massachusetts. This Capital Skills grant will help prepare students to be ready to step right into entry level positions as soon as they graduate or prep them to take further courses in college. That's a real advantage for Murdock students.

Our high school technology teacher Mike Fontaine is working in collaboration with middle school teacher Sheila Hunt and librarian Jenna Morin to offer students exposure to a wide range



FROM THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S
OFFICE
.....
STEVE HADDAD

of technological possibilities. Mike's third floor classroom sports big screen monitors and a 3-D printer. Students will be able to design apps and

programs of their own.

Speaking of technology, Google has a program which now allows parents to follow what's going on in classrooms every day, even knowing for example when papers are due. This is one of the innovative ways we're reaching out to improve communication with families and help them not feel isolated from what's happening in school.

One of those things "happening in school" is Murdock's participation in the United Way/MWCC Youth Venture program which enables our students to develop projects designed to have a positive impact on their school and community at large. Michaela Benedict's, for example, is called "Band Buddies". It's aimed at getting younger students excited about and involved in music. That's important as we rebuild our band program. Lily LeBlanc has submitted what's known as an "action plan" to continue the ongoing school-wide effort to combat bullying and promote tolerance and understanding. Cobie Rice will be working with the fire department to raise awareness about fire safety. While adults are of course involved (we call them 'champions', not 'faculty advisors'), the students do the work. As Youth Venture faculty champion Kris Provost put it, "it's about youth empowerment" These projects and others in the works provide opportunities for students to contribute as productive citizens, helping to make Murdock and Winchendon better places to live, work, and study.

We are well aware we live in an era of school choice. Families are consumers and are consistently on the lookout to find the best fit for their sons and daughters. We are confident Murdock is a high school where they will get more than the proverbial bang for their buck.

In future columns, I will be discussing what we are doing in lower grades, from pre-k through middle school, telling you about things which I firmly believe will impress you. For now, suffice to say we are excited about the road on which we are traveling. We have a vibrant and progressive high school which should be a destination for every family seeing a high-caliber and quality education.