A 'celebration of place'

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Shopping local is a celebration of place, said Mike Keen, director of Indiana University South Bend’s Center for a Sustainable Future.

“It’s celebrating who we are and where we live,” he said, explaining that local candy companies, wineries, boutiques and artists have products that people can’t find elsewhere.

Shopping local, he said, allows you to give the community the “triple bottom line” — it’s economically sound, environmentally friendly and socially responsible.

“What we’re giving, buying or making is done in such a way,” he said, “that the people who made it are getting fair wages that enable them to meet their real needs.”

A 2012 study conducted by Civic Economics, an economic development consulting firm, found that independent, locally owned businesses of all types and sizes recirculate a substantially greater proportion of their revenues — 47.7 percent — in the local economy than do their chain competitors — 13.6 percent.

“Keeping the money local grows the local economy,” said Rebecca Maalouf, owner of Camellia’s Cosmetics in Mishawaka and president of ShoLo, a Michiana group focused on promoting local businesses.

“It has a multiplier effect,” she said. “The local spending always circles right back to you as a consumer.”

She said there is a common misconception that shopping local is more expensive than shopping chain stores or more difficult than shopping online, but she doesn’t feel that is the case.

“It’s a happier experience,” she said. “Working right with the owner is more personal. Also, the quality is going to be better when it is a local owner, because they work so hard on the products that represent them.”

And unlike online shopping, buyers are less likely to make a buying error because they can actually view products and talk to the sellers in person. If a mistake is made, returns can be handled without shipping costs.

“Even as a buyer for my store, I have never made mistakes buying in person,” she said. “But I have made a lot buying products from websites.”
As an added benefit, local products are typically unique, because they are made out of local goods, said Krista Bailey, assistant director at the Center for a Sustainable Future. She explained that this year she plans to give gifts of honey from Unity Garden. The honey recently won first place in a statewide honey competition.

“How often do you get a chance to give the best honey in the state,” she asked, adding, “And it supports this organization and this project. … It’s a fun thing to show off.”

Buying a local product also doesn’t incur as much of a carbon footprint, she said. It doesn’t have the same shipping and transportation costs as a purchase from a national chain.

Many people focus on giving to local charities because of the direct benefit to the community, Maalouf said, but they don’t always think of local shopping as having that same benefit.

But, money aside, “it’s a great experience,” she said. “Shopping is supposed to be fun and not just all dollars and cents.”