

Save pennies to spend dollars; shop locally to economize

By Maryellen Hofmann

I love an occasional trip to a downtown area department store, such as window shopping along the Magnificent Mile or visiting charming small towns with quaint storefront shops. But years of working in a shopping mall cured me of shopping as a form of recreation. Not even mall walking for exercise holds any appeal to me.

This time last year, I wrote about the pleasures, and the benefits to the local economy, of shopping close to home. The topic generated much response.

Since then, some of my favorite local haunts have closed, such as WineStyles and Home Baked Pizza; others have opened, such as Sweet Annie's and Creative Seeds; and some businesses simply swapped addresses, such as Balagios.

Readers are clear on one thing: they love local businesses. Nobody likes an empty storefront. The challenge: how to keep local businesses strong in a weak economy. The solution: save pennies to spend dollars. That was my grandfather's philosophy. During the Great Depression, my grandparents learned to live frugally and still enjoy life to the fullest. It served them well.

We would be wise to heed their advice. Live simply and save up for an occasional splurge, without guilt. Here are 10 ways to watch your wallet, treat yourself and keep the local economy viable in tough times.

1. Pizza on a budget: Local organizations sell discount coupons for Aurelios. If the kids don't hit you up for one, buy a frequent diner card and always save the shields from your pizza box. They are worth 50 cents toward your next purchase and you can use more than one at a time. Prefer Fifth Quarter pizza? It's half-price pizza on Tuesday nights.

2. Soup and sandwich: Nielsen's Bakery on Ridge Road in Homewood can't be beat for an inexpensive lunch. Soup, half sandwich and complimentary cake cost less than \$5. Customers complained that the free cake was bad for our waistlines. They cut it out. We missed the cake, complained some more. They brought it back.

3. A dime off your cup of coffee: Trivia buffs can get a 10-cent discount by answering the trivia question of the day correctly at Caribou Coffee. (Example: What was the lowest temperature *ever* recorded in Chicago^o Answer: minus-27 degrees on Jan. 20, 1985). The location at 183rd Street in Homewood has become a true community gathering spot. More community business takes place there than

you can imagine. So much so. they even set up a large table in back to accommodate meetings and study groups. (And. yes, the kids actually study.)

4.Operation Doughnation: OK, sandwiches at Panera Bread in Cherry Creek Plaza are a bit pricey. But the bread is superb and they donate generously to community fundraisers. We won a baker's dozen of bagels every month for a year once, which was valued at more than \$100, and leftovers go to local food pantries.

5.Mardi Gras and Night in Vienna: Think you can't afford a round of golf at a local country club, tickets to Cubs / Sox Crosstown Classic, prime seats for the symphony? Think again. These are just some of the auction items available at the annual Mardi Gras and H-F Music Tour Auction. Proceeds from the Feb. 28 Mardi Gras event benefit Flossmoor District PTO and tickets are modestly priced. A Night in Vienna, set for Feb. 7th benefits the H-F Symphony Orchestra and Chorus European student spring music tour. And again, tickets are reasonable and you don't have to have a kid involved to attend,

6.Best foot forward: Sortie of the swankiest salons offer discounts on pedicures in February. Try Nail Savvy in Homewood or Eden in Flossmoor.

7.Fresh Starts: Admit it. This falls into the splurge category. But if you want to impress someone, such as your boss, a client or future in-laws, this is the place to do it. No city taxes, stuffy waiters or valet parking. Bargains and special dinner deals are available if you sign up for e-mail alerts, such as the 2009 Resolution Dinner Specials, which are midweek fixed price three-course meals for only \$20.09.

8.Winter clearance: Poppies, Harvest, Bella Vita - all of these stores have great bargains. But what's a shopping excursion without lunch? Bring a few dollars along for a burger at the Flossmoor Station or a burrito at Cilantro,

9.Golf Junket: Having second thoughts about spending hundreds of dollars tting off to Myrtle Beach to play golf this winter? Why not check out the Full Swing Golf Simulator at the H-F Racquet and Fitness Club? Play one of 60 golf courses around the world in 3-D, or just practice on the range.

10. Your pick: Don't see your favorite bargain spot listed here⁹ Send me your suggestions for future publication.