

Buy local campaign under way

By Dan Linehan

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MANKATO — If every business and institution in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties shifts 5 percent of their spending from outside the area to local sources, it would infuse \$ 83 million into the economy and create 892 jobs, according to a new study.

Greater Mankato Growth, a chamber of commerce and economic development group, has created what it hopes will be an engine to tap that potential. Its "Buy & Build Greater Mankato" campaign recognizes businesses and institutions that agree to choose locally produced goods and services for one-twentieth of their spending.

Alternatively, if businesses are already doing as much as they can and are spending at least 65 percent on local products they can be a part of the program.

A dozen businesses had signed on by Wednesday, and hundreds more were expected to join in the coming weeks.

Greater Mankato Growth hired the University of Minnesota Extension Service to study how much money is flowing out of the community and how much doesn't have to.

According to the study, businesses and institutions (including local governments) in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties spend \$1.9 billion each year on products and services outside of the area that could be purchased here.

The Mankato area is the second in the state, after Rochester, to commission such a study.

And while the study itself focused on these two counties for data collection reasons, spending money in this region could include cities like New Ulm and Waseca.

The study will be posted on Greater Mankato Growth's Web site next week.

It's essentially a "buy

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local" initiative, but Greater Mankato Growth intentionally avoided that term, Executive Director Jonathan Zierdt said.

"Some people have an adverse reaction to 'buy local,'" he said.

It sounds too much like an order to spend your money, he said, but every business and consumer is interested in a strong local economy.

Greater Mankato Growth has beefed up its online business directory, www.greatermankatodirectory.com, to help businesses and institutions learn how they can spend money locally.

They've added all the businesses they could find - about 2,400 in all, whether they are members of Greater Mankato Growth or not - in a directory searchable by location, keyword or category. Participating entities get a "Buy & Build" logo next to their name as well as a real-life window decal. Zierdt said the effort doesn't ask local businesses to sacrifice their bottom line, but many might not be aware there is a local option.

"Businesses are like people," he says. "They want to do business with people they know."

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