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# Vermont campaign has a shop local goal

MONTPELIER – Janice Shade is hoping Vermonters will take the "Independents Pledge" this week.

Shade, the executive director of the nonprofit group Local First Vermont, will try to convince residents to spend a week shopping at local stores, which many believe better benefits the local economy by keeping money in the community.

The group, which celebrated its first year of operation Friday, will kick off what it calls Independents Week Monday at a rally on the Statehouse lawn in Montpelier. Shade said she will seeking promises from residents and state officials to keep their purchases local.

"A lot of people have tried buying their food locally, so we thought why not try and extend that to other items locally as well?" said Shade, an Underhill resident. "We're asking people to spend a week making their regular purchases at local stores."

This will be Local First Vermont's first large action on the issue of shopping local. The group also has a Bingo-style card for download at its Web site so that participants to check off the types of goods they have purchased from local stores.

The message may find receptive ears in Montpelier.

Claire Benedict, the owner of Bear Pond Books in Montpelier, said the store signed up as a member of Local First Vermont a year ago out of concern for how larger box stores and corporate retail stores affect smaller, local business owners.

Throughout the week, the store will be highlighting local authors and urging customers to shop at other local stores near it along the city's Main Street.

Bear Pond Books prides itself on being local, she said, and many of its customers go there because its owners don't live out of state and aren't corporate. Being local allows a business to cater to the locals and carry merchandise they know

customers will be interested in, she said.

"People want to know the owners of the stores they shop at," Benedict said. "Our kids all go to school together. We're all part of the same community. And the money stays here in the area and doesn't leave the state for some corporate office."

During the Statehouse rally, which begins at 10 a.m. and comes just two days before the July 4 holiday, organizers will sign a "Declaration of Independents" and will ask state officials, including Gov. James Douglas, to sign onto the effort as well.

Douglas is urging Vermonters to buy local agricultural products this summer, according to a press release sent out earlier this week. Public service announcements on the buy-local effort should be on radio stations soon, according to the governor.

"If Vermonters shifted just 10 percent of their food spending to buying local we could add \$100 million to the Vermont economy," Douglas said.

Local First Vermont has 96 members across the state, many of them small businesses in and near the towns of Montpelier, Manchester and Norwich, where key members of the group's steering committee live.

Shade said the group is now focused on expanding to other parts of the state and members have cast their eyes toward Rutland, Middlebury, Brattleboro and Burlington.

"We're hearing from lots of people who believe in our mission," she said.

On the Web: [www.localfirstvermont.org](http://www.localfirstvermont.org)

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