

Grow Northfield's Retail Health

It takes a group effort to keep our retail community strong and vibrant, and though Northfield is experiencing adequate retail health, it could be healthier.

That was the diagnosis of Bruce Schwartau, an educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, who has conducted two forums for local business owners and other stakeholders about the concept of retail health in Northfield. Among the things that Mr. Schwartau pointed out was how local businesses are doing in comparison with other places throughout the state.

Northfield has a lot going for it. But its long-term retail health could be threatened by several factors, among which are the close proximity of the city to shopping opportunities in the metro area and the growing numbers of people shopping via the Internet.

Bottom line: The prognosis isn't bad, but it could be better. Some local retailers are doing their part to try to keep the local economy in shape. Shopkeepers are keeping their shops open later on weeknights, giving consumers reasons to stay in town and shop. Others are going to companies in town, working with them to buy locally.

Then there are organizations, such as the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation, which hosted the recent forums, and the Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce. They are providing channels to help businesses and individuals network as a way of nourishing the local economy.

These efforts of shopkeepers, business owners and organizations are all well and good. But the efforts will be for naught if the everyday Northfield resident doesn't respond as well. To stretch the medical metaphor even further, the condition of the retail community will diminish and the patient will grow weaker if the entire team isn't working to restore that health to a robust state.

All the prescriptions in the world won't do any good if we don't take the medicine. Likewise, all the encouragement to local businesses won't do any good if we — all of us — don't support those businesses and shop locally.

We won't be able to buy everything in Northfield, but it falls to us and our pocketbooks to make the effort to patronize locally owned businesses.

Northfield has much to be proud of. But can we do better?

Absolutely.

It takes everyone doing their part and working together to build upon our strengths and to strengthen the businesses in our own backyard.