



Happy Thanksgiving

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## Small Business Saturday takes place Nov. 24

### Chamber helps reinforce area economy

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**FOLEY** — Not keen on the chaos big-box store shopping entails? Looking to discover the treasures of your hometown businesses? Small Business Saturday has you covered.

Nestled neatly between Black Friday and Cyber Monday, Small Business Saturday was first observed Nov. 27, 2010. The event has continued to be an annual occurrence that gives the mom-and-pop shops a chance to shine. But small businesses in town are not simply hinging everything on Saturday.

The Foley Area Chamber of Commerce works year-round collaborating with businesses and the economic development authority to strengthen the area economy.

“The chamber is always focusing on supporting and maintaining local business,” said Kendra Berger, chamber president. “For us, every day is Small Business Saturday.”

The chamber advocates and assists businesses in a year-round effort. To the chamber, maintaining good working relationships with Foley’s businesses is key to the town’s quality of life and is essential to cultivating a sense of unity between residents.

“The convenience of shopping local and getting to know your town and its people are something big-box stores can’t offer,” Berger said. “The money stays closer to home, too, which creates a positive cycle for citizens and businesses alike. We depend on each other.”

Foley Area Chamber of Commerce has its eye on helping all businesses in town flourish, members or



PHOTO BY JAKE DOETKOTT

Kendra Berger (left) and Amy Hageman stand beside the Falcon National Bank vault Nov. 13 in Foley. Berger and Hageman are members of the Foley Area Chamber of Commerce.

not.

The chamber’s premiere outreach event for local businesses is the annual Foley Business Expo which will take place Feb. 2, 2019.

“The expo is key in spreading awareness of the businesses in the area,” said Amy Hageman, chamber executive director. “Each year we gain new members from the event. This is instrumental for our program and our businesses’ effectiveness.”

The expo allows businesses the opportunity to meet the public in a low-stakes environment with activities and goodies for kids and adults alike.

Berger said it is at times difficult to be a small business but that the chamber tries to increase small-town shopping’s allure.

“Small businesses are a use-it-or-lose-it commodity,” Berger said. “We are excited to see how the Dewey Street renovations and beautification project will influence downtown involvement.”

According to Berger, a focus of the city’s economic development authority and the chamber is making Foley a destination with a thriving and engaged community.

“We want to incentivize people to shop downtown whether they live in town or are stopping by on a drive,” Berger said. “We’d simply like to see downtown be a more lively place.”

So far, this has not been an easy task.

“It’s tough to get consumer stores downtown,” Hageman said. “Retail brings people in but most of the downtown shops are services and professions and they aren’t high traffic. People go downtown, visit one place and then they’re gone.”

Other financially-focused organizations around the area have their own outlook.

“A central tenant we operate on is to highlight the assets in the community that already exist,” said John Uphoff, Benton Economic

Partnership Executive Director. “The stores are there because they offer utility. The nature of some services

don’t keep you coming back consistently.”

The downtown area is tucked away from Highways

25 and 23. This makes attracting drivers challenging and limits how well businesses can advertise with signage. Berger said it can be a limitation.

“Both highways bring a high volume of people through town, but we lack a business-packed frontage road that can entice drivers to stop,” Berger said.

Despite the hurdle, the chamber, the city and other organizations have found ways to encourage and promote small businesses through networking and events.

“Our Foley Bucks program is one of the big initiatives the city has that incentivizes people to shop locally,” said Sarah Brunn, city administrator. “During certain times of the year, if people bring in receipts that prove they spent \$100 or more in town then we reimburse them.”

With a fistful of ideas, the chamber and its members are hopeful Small Business Saturday will positively impact their hopes for downtown’s development and community engagement.



PHOTO BY JAKE DOETKOTT

A chamber membership plaque rests on a wall in Foley Nov. 14. The chamber hosts meetings where business owners and citizens can network together to strengthen the economy.