

## Scarsdale women form group to reinvigorate businesses

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When Lisa Tretler and Jane Veron noticed local business in Scarsdale taking a downturn, they decided to leverage their combined business expertise to promote shopping and dining in the 'Dale's downtown.

Through The Acceleration Project, their not-for-profit consultancy that pairs local professional women with local small businesses in need of strategic advice, Tretler and Veron gathered 19 people who surveyed 514 local residents and 50 local businesses earlier this year. The volunteers contributed approximately 2,400 hours of labor to produce a study aimed at encouraging people to patronize local businesses. The study is accompanied by a marketing proposal featuring the slogans "Shop the 'Dale" and "Dine the 'Dale."

"Our interest, through The Acceleration Project, is twofold. We want to help small businesses and help create economic growth, and we also want to harness the skills of local professional women. This was the perfect intersection of the two," said Tretler, who holds an MBA from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. Veron, who co-founded The Acceleration Project with Tretler, earned an MBA from Harvard Business School. "We usually work one-on-one, but with this project we felt we could help the whole Scarsdale business community."

Presented to the Scarsdale Chamber of Commerce June 16, the study polled visitors to downtown Scarsdale on their behaviors and aggregated the data to provide suggestions on how Scarsdale businesses can draw more local customers.

"Since the recession, there's been a significant shift in buyer practices," Tretler said. "People have turned to shopping on the Internet, and consumers are more price-sensitive and more demanding. We

know local customers like the support they get from local business owners. They value the rapport, and they have an expectation that local business will treat them well, and if not, they'll go elsewhere."

Tretler said the trend toward online shopping, driven by lower prices and the ease of not having to leave home, has hurt



Lisa Tretler, left, and Jane Veron, of Scarsdale, used their business acumen to produce a study aimed at motivating consumers to patronize local businesses.

local businesses in Westchester County and elsewhere. "For local businesses, they feel it when their neighbors close down," she said.

Among the study's findings, 68 percent of the consumers polled said they patronize local doctors, and 62 percent of the professional service providers (doctors, home service professionals and business service professionals) interviewed reported no change in their business levels over the past three years.

While local consumers continue to shop locally for liquor and home goods, and visit local beauty shops frequently, shoppers surveyed noted they have spent

less in Scarsdale recently. They've also often gone elsewhere to shop for apparel, with 34 percent reporting they've shopped outside of Scarsdale, be it online or in person, to purchase clothing.

Mike Wilson, of Wilson and Son Jewelers on Chase Road, said the study showed that some assumptions the business community made about a drop-off in business were incorrect.

"Parts of the study were quite eye-opening," he said. Wilson and Son first opened in Scarsdale in 1932. "The study is really making us rethink our marketing. We're going to start using the 'Shop the 'Dale' logo in the shop and on social media."

In their presentation, Veron and Tretler noted that 68 percent of businesses that have participated in similar "buy local" campaigns have gained new customers, and businesses in communities where "buy local" campaigns have been enacted have seen sales growth of up to 7 percent.

"Even in a town like Scarsdale, our small businesses face the same challenges. They need to bring in enough sales to cover the expenses. Very often, consumers forget that," said Tretler. Slides in the presentation made to the chamber also noted that of \$100 spent with a local independent business, \$45 goes back into the local economy – as opposed to \$0 when shopping online.

The proposed "Shop the 'Dale" marketing campaign emphasizes to both businesses and consumers that Scarsdale's sense of community is tied to the vibrancy of its local businesses. Tretler said the campaign will kick off in September.

"We'll be at all the different retail hubs to push the logo and the messaging to consumers. We're hoping consumers will recognize the importance of it all," Tretler said. Noting that both she and Veron live in Scarsdale, Tretler said, "We'll be able to hopefully make a great impact right in our own backyard."