



BETWEEN THE LINES

by Dawn Chafe

Hometown heroes

Not so long ago, a small business owner I know and admire took to social media to blow off some steam. Her handcrafted artisanal products are coveted by many – which is why this entrepreneur is often a target for fundraising requests. Every year, she donates considerably more of her time and resources than her accountant considers prudent for a company her size. So, when she signed up for a charitable event herself, and invited her friends and colleagues to support her efforts as she had supported theirs time and again, she fully expected that her previous generosity would be rewarded in similar fashion. Instead, only a handful of people responded.

Angry, hurt, she vented on Facebook. A few days later, she questioned whether she should have said anything. Would it have been better for her to stay silently dissatisfied?

Personally, I was mad for her – and proud of her. Whether intentional or not, those who had chosen to answer her request by ignoring it, were saying that their time and money wasn't as valuable as her craft and creativity. By bringing attention to that underlying message – in the open, honest and professional manner she used (a lesson in proper social media ranting) – she opened a good many eyes to the insult we often hurl at our local business owners.

Think about it: where do we look for the donations that support our community groups, sports teams and other do-good initiatives?

Chances are, it's a local company. Now, be honest: where do you spend your money? When you need a product or service, does the company that supported you (or your child) immediately come to mind? If it doesn't, you've just returned their generosity with a slap in the face.

Well, says you, altruism is fine in its place – but you can buy a cheaper version of that product online. Keen thrifters that we are, life is about getting more for less, even if we have to figuratively stab our neighbour in the back to do it.

Here's an idea: why don't you just give the guy next door a chance? Instead of assuming that the product down the road

is more expensive than the one from away, take the time to check it out for yourself. It may be that the local product is better quality, or offers better service, or is priced more competitively than you think. And all of those things together might just make you change your mind about shopping local. Or not. But at least give them a fighting chance.

And that's just for a start. I believe we need to go beyond that to thinking of our local companies and success stories as the true heroes that they are. They are our job creators, our tax payers, our economic engines and community supporters.

In this issue's special report on Nova Scotia, we deliberately chose to focus on areas outside the main urban core of Halifax Regional Municipality. We know times are tough across the board, but we also know that the lower the population density, the more difficult economic stability is to achieve. Our goal was to talk to people in Nova Scotia's rural communities and discover how they are faring in the face of declining traditional industries. As farming, fishing and manufacturing regress, what – if anything – can these small communities, with their even smaller local business bases, do to survive?

Our research led us to Wolfville, Lunenburg and Truro, a trio of municipalities so steeped in perseverance, resilience and innovation that they are not just surviving, they are thriving. They showed us how to transform a 25-cent pear into a hundred-dollar product. Taught us that a single wharf can land multiple species simultaneously (with the most lucrative of the two-legged variety). And revealed that the true value of location can be found with the proper perspective.

The underlying moral to all of their stories is that the community that sticks together, grows together. The reverse is true too. A good thing to keep in mind the next time someone asks for your support.

Dawn Chafe started with *Atlantic Business Magazine* as a freelancer 18 years ago, becoming editor in 1998.

FEEDBACK

✉ dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com

🐦 [@AtlanticBus](https://twitter.com/AtlanticBus); [@ABM_Editor](https://twitter.com/ABM_Editor); [#BetweenTheLines](https://twitter.com/BetweenTheLines)

If the company that supported you doesn't immediately come to mind, you've just returned their generosity with a slap in the face