Our Community First, Seriously

by Richard Burton, Publisher

Sam Walton said it best when he said, â€œâ€¦weâ€™ll lower the cost of living for everyone, not just in America, but weâ€™ll give the world an opportunity to see what itâ€™s like to save and have a better lifestyle, a better life for all.â€• Sadly enough, Wal-Martâ€™s smiley face logo is no longer smiling. To see horns protruding from the happy little guy would be no surprise these days.

According to area Wal-Mart critics, the shopping behemoths have stomped all over small town America, wreaking havoc on local economies by lowering wages and reducing access to healthcare. Bendâ€™s rejection of Wal-Martâ€™s proposed 200,000-square-foot Supercenter was upheld by Oregonâ€™s Land Use Board of Appeals. There is widespread concern that the enormous amount of traffic generated by a development of this size will not be supported by the current transportation system.

Wal-Mart has become more of a four letter word to those deciding collectively to take a stance against the giant supermarket. These groups of people seem to come together for oppositionâ€™s sake only, without one clear thought. Almost overnight, itâ€™s become politically correct to be anti-Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is not affiliated with any particular political party, rather certain political parties have declared Wal-Mart the earthâ€™s enemy, a threat not only to our economy but our environment as well. This mindset is pure lunacy. Special interest groups never form with the opening of a new Shopko, Target or Fred Meyer store, who carry the same type of products. Itâ€™s become un-American, unfashionable to shop at Wal-Mart. Is it un-American to shop at Target? It should be, their prices are higher.

The major opponent to the Wal-Mart Supercenter is an organization called Our Community First who call themselves a diverse, motivated and dynamic group of concerned Central Oregonians. Furthermore, they state in their premise that they believe Wal-Mart aggressively pursues a business model that is destructive to the economic, social, and environmental fabric of our Central Oregon communities, the state, America, and the planet.

Thereâ€™s nothing diverse about a group who claims to understand the economic machinations of the planet. That in itself is laughable. Certainly, Sam Walton did not set out to destroy small town America or the earth for heavenâ€™s sake. Furthermore, these critics do not speak for all of Bend. More important perhaps is the fact that they are in dire need of a crash course in capitalism in order to obtain a better understanding of economics instead of parading into city hearings like a bunch of religious fanatics.

Organizations like Our Community First have become more destructive to the economic growth then the development of another Wal-Mart. One already exists on Pinebrook Boulevard and so far, the devil has not been seen dancing around the wide aisles where the smiley face logo reflects happily upon the polished floors.

Whatâ€™s so bad about an air conditioned store larger than three football fields where one can buy high quality, low cost food, clothing, tools, supplies, toys, get photos developed, portraits taken, a hair cut, tires rotated, an oil change and pick up prescriptions all in the same day? In todayâ€™s hurried world, convenience counts. Most importantly though is cost and to have both in one location is astounding. Like Sam Walton said, itâ€™s a better lifestyle, a better life for all. Without Wal-Mart, millions would be unable to afford luxuries very recently unaffordable to lower income families. Purchasing products at Wal-Mart will help thousands in Bend save more, making it possible to spend more on other local businesses. A new development will bring an influx of dollars during the construction phase, with the need of contractors, steel workers, concrete workers and building supplies. The trickle down effect will only boost our economy further.

Wal-Mart has successfully raised the real income level of America. Defined as the amount of wealth that can be acquired with income, real income has increased since productivity has risen. With lower prices comes more wealth. Consumers can buy twice as much when prices fall 50%, raising real income. Emphasizing lower prices is Wal-Martâ€™s main idea. Critics of Wal-Mart think of income in nominal terms only. This is not only dangerous, but embarrassing. A fall in prices is equal to an increase in pay. Since productivity has increased, products are made more cheaply and in greater abundance. Almost everyone on our ill fated planet can afford Wal-Mart prices. A new Wal-Mart will increase tax revenues as well.

Bend is smarter than Our Community First members. We need this new Wal-Mart Supercenter. A fresh, new, clean, well-lit shopping market on the North side of town will be a welcome sight for all residents. It will only bring more jobs into the community, providing more economic growth. To say that Wal-Mart is responsible for loss of wages is missing the point entirely. Rather then focusing on nominal income, anti Wal-Mart groups should look at production. The basic premise of capitalism is production of goods. Only high production yields real wealth. Wal-Martâ€™s ever increasing production rate is phenomenal. Once again, it is a matter of real income versus nominal income. Lowering prices is increasing salaries and everyone benefits from higher pay. Attempting to halt free enterprise harms everyone. There is much choice in a free market society. Residents who donâ€™t enjoy the Wal-Mart experience can certainly exercise their right to shop elsewhere.

A second, even more tiresome argument from haters of the low price super giant is a reduction in access to healthcare. Sam Walton was alive during the ongoing healthcare crisis. He was fully aware of the unfair policies implemented within this broken system. It was not the Walton family greed rearing its ugly head, taking more and more away from the lowly workers. Instead, itâ€™s an ill planned healthcare system causing pain to us all, not just Wal-Mart employees. In the past, healthcare was not provided by employers. For decades now, the government has provided tax incentives to companies, pressuring larger corporations to offer healthcare as a fringe-benefit. Employees now come to expect these cushy health plans, which are no longer near as plush. Blame Uncle Sam, not Sam Walton.

Wal-Mart has three weeks to decide whether or not to appeal to the ruling of the Oregonâ€™s Land Use Board of Appeals or to withdraw and start the process over. Either way, it is in Bendâ€™s best interest that Wal-Mart executives come better prepared with unbiased testimony from city and county traffic engineers. Bend is growing by leaps and bounds. According to the city attorney, Pete Schannauer, the current transportation system is already failing at several intersections. Surely a transportation plan can be devised that will benefit all concerned, paving new highways that will only aid Bendâ€™s continual, inevitable growth. Whether a new Wal-Mart is built or not, improvements will need to be made. With a growing population comes an increase in traffic.

Wal-Mart is a shining example of capitalism. Our nation was built on this very concept. To listen to groups like Our Community First will only hurt the growth and development of the fine town. Sam Walton once said, â€œCapital isnâ€™t scarce; vision is.â€• Our Community First has no vision, but Bend residents that truly care about our ever expanding economy can see a wonderful new development looming on the horizon.

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