

CREDIT UNIONS GIVING STAFF CASH TO SPEND ON SMALL BUSINESSES

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PHOTO: SUBMITTED Staff from the OMISTA Credit Union play trivia and enjoy a glass of wine at the Magnetic Hill Winery as part of the Loyal2Local Challenge. Credit union employees in Atlantic Canada received \$25 to spend at a local business and OMISTA Credit Unions matched that contribution for their staff.

Credit unions across Atlantic Canada, including New Brunswick, are encouraging their staff to become ambassadors for their local businesses through a yearly challenge.

This is the sixth year of the Loyal2Local Challenge that first began during the COVID-19 pandemic to help small businesses. Credit unions in Atlantic Central -the trade association for credit unions in Atlantic Canada-gave their employees \$25 to spend at a local business of their choice.

Through the history of the initiative more than \$500,000 has been spent by credit union staff on local businesses, attractions, and products. This year's challenge runs until August. 15.

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Chandelle Legault, branch manager for the OMISTA Credit Union on Mountain Road, said the OMISTA Credit Union branches are matching it, giving staff an extra \$25.

There are four OMISTA branches in New Brunswick.

Legault said she already is a strong supporter of local businesses, like the farmers' markets, local pubs, and agricultural spots like Belliveau Orchard and Lavender at Ocean Breeze Farm. She has noticed other people in her office also like to shop at small businesses.

When possible, she likes to eat local food and buy locally made gifts, but the Loyal2Local gives her and her colleagues an added incentive to help New Brunswick businesses, particularly at a time when some are taking financial hits with the rising cost of supplies and utilities.

"I think it's wonderful that our credit union gives us money to go out and support local," she said. "I prefer to shop there than I do the big box stores."

This year, the OMISTA Credit Union branches are having their branch managers each plan an outing for their employees in order to spend the money.

Legault said her office pooled their money together to have dinner at Rossano's Italian Grill followed by wine and trivia at Magnetic Hill Winery. She noted some of her staff have never been to the winery before, and the cash from the credit union helped them to discover a new place.

Zach Everett, co-owner and wine maker at Magnetic Hill Winery, said he appreciates the challenge from the credit union. Many local businesses have just started to recover from the pandemic, especially tourism outlets.

"This summer we're finally getting some wind back in our sails," he said. "Initiatives like this just helps put a smile on your face and gets you through some of those hard days with all the problems that a small business encounters on a daily basis."

He noted the costs of fertilizer, bottles and labels are some of the things that have jumped in cost for the winery. Though tourism is strong this summer, he said businesses rely on their local customers.

"None of us can survive longterm sustainably off of just tourism summer numbers two or three months a year. We need the local community for all year long," he said.

Everett said he would like to see more similar initiatives from other companies to motivate their staff to support local. At the winery they use locally made products in their charcuterie boards and host popups at restaurants in the area.

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