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## **Former Retailer Provides Her Own Economic Stimulus Plan for Main Street**

*The 3/50 Project unites small business and consumers in stabilizing their local economy*

Minneapolis, MN, March 19, 2009 — Having been an independent stationery store owner for fourteen years, Cinda Baxter understood the pain felt by retailers when the economy sank and consumers held back. What began as an economic downturn in the autumn had become a psychological tsunami by March 1st.

What the country needed, in her opinion, was a meeting of the minds between two groups that held valuable stakes in the game—small business owners and members of their communities.

Enter The 3/50 Project.

With a tag line “*Save your local economy three stores at a time,*” the project’s goal is to promote shopping in locally owned businesses while thanking customers for the positive impact that decision has on a local economy.

“We’re constantly inundated with doom and gloom,” says Baxter, now a retail consultant and professional speaker. “The system is broken, the banks are frozen, the economy is bleeding. That’s all we hear. The images painted by the media are ghastly and devoid of hope. What we need—what we crave—as a nation is to pinpoint areas where positive change can occur, then feel good about having promoted them.”

By early March, she’d decided enough was enough, and that it was time to give retailers ammunition to fight back with. Rather than get tangled in complex messaging and deployment, Baxter combined a straightforward theme, a free flyer, and her blog as the mechanism to launch The 3/50 Project.

“We ask consumers to think about which three stores they’d miss if they disappeared, then remind them to return there,” explains Baxter. “Shoppers have become so rooted in thinking about the essentials that they’ve forgotten about the little gift store on the corner whose owner remembers their name.”

“Fifty comes from the idea that if even half the employed population spent a mere \$50 per month in locally owned retail stores, those purchases would generate more than \$42.6 billion in revenue,” she continues. “That’s a huge impact for a relatively small investment.”

Which leads to a third number on the flyer, sixty-eight—the dollar amount that remains in a community’s economy for every \$100 spent in locally owned stores. By contrast, only \$43 per one hundred remains local when spent in national chains; little or no revenue results from online purchases.

“In essence, the whole thing boils down to ‘Pick 3, spend 50, save the economy.’ It’s really that simple.”

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Since ease of use was key to store owners jumping on board, Baxter designed a free flyer for participants to download, print on any color printer, then hand to consumers with their purchases. “The idea is to look customers in the eye, put this right in their hands, and say ‘thank you for shopping in a locally owned store’ rather than just pop these in the bottom of a bag and hope someone sees them.”

Within 24 hours of providing the link on her blog, things began to light up. Retailers were sharing the flyer with other businesses. Property managers were spreading the news to tenants. Thank you notes were arriving via email every hour. Trade publications and blogs were asking about guest posts and columns promoting the plan, and a movie theater requested a copy large enough to display on their screens for waiting audiences to view.

“The best part about 3/50 is that it’s so down to earth, so straightforward, so accessible,” reflects the enthusiastic champion of independent retailers. “This is a labor of love that store owners and customers can share.”

Given the level of interest, a dedicated website has been established to promote the movement, link to the free flyer, and list participating retailers and other supporters. It can be found at: <http://the350project.org>

#### **About Cinda Baxter:**

Cinda Baxter understands retail from the inside out. Recipient of two national Retailer Excellence Awards and press coverage ranging from Modern Bride to The Wall Street Journal, she now “pays it forward” to retailers and vendors through her consulting company Always Upward, as a Contributing Editor for Gifts and Decorative Accessories Magazine, and as founder of The 3/50 Project.

Widely recognized as an expert in the gift and stationery industry, Cinda’s resumé includes seats on distinguished boards: AmericasMart Atlanta, the National Stationery Show, Retailer Networks Incorporated, and the Gift and Home Trade Association (GHTA), where she also served on the Board of Directors. Her most recent appointment to the Gift for Life Board of Directors is of particular note. She’s been a featured speaker at numerous trade shows, including the Hong Kong Gift and Premium Show, the New York International Gift Show, the Los Angeles Gift Show, and the National Stationery Show—and at several regional marts, including Dallas, Chicago, Seattle, and Boston.

As founder of acclaimed online communities RetailSpeaks (independent gift and stationery retailers) and Brilliant Ink (professional stationers dedicated to original design), Cinda is considered a pioneer of social networking in the retail industry—a reflection of her passion to help community based business survive and thrive for years to come.

#### **Graphics**

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