

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. How will being a member impact my business - will it improve sales and bring new customers?

A. We certainly believe it will. Your membership will tell consumers you are LOCAL! The other members of the Unique Eugene network will definitely become aware of your business and refer customers to you. The website will list and link to your business 24/7. Participating in promotions and ads, like the Holiday Coupon book, will reach new customers.

Q. Didn't Unique Eugene used to be an exclusive organization and why has that changed now?

A. We initially were a small group of mostly non-competing businesses and worked together as an advertising co-op. We realize that long term we need to work harder to educate the community about the importance of "Buying Local" and the members are not concerned about competing with other local businesses. It is the online mega-retailers (e.g. Amazon) who our customers are shopping with that will slowly erode the diversity of our community. We need to work together to let consumers know that shopping with LOCAL businesses keeps their investment in our community, improving the economy and livability of Eugene.

Q. How is Unique Eugene different than the Chamber?

A. The Chamber does what they do very well and several of our members are also Chamber members. The Chamber focuses on bringing business of all types to the community. They provide classes for members on running a business and provide networking opportunities. They also market their members to visitors who contact them looking for, for instance, lodging. They have members who are independent businesses and corporations or chains. The Chamber is not focused specifically on the interests of independent businesses.

Q. Can a franchise be a part of UE?

A. No, franchises may be owned by a local person but they have the power of group purchasing, co-op advertising, and brand name recognition, thereby getting the benefits we are trying to bring by branding locally owned, independent business.

Q. Can local cannabis shops be members of UE?

A. One of the member requirements is that the business must welcome all people without restriction based on age, gender identity, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability or religion. Cannabis shops have age restrictions and are therefore not eligible.

Q. What kind of time commitment is there for members?

A. We ask that you set up your business profile when you join online. This takes about 20 minutes and you can add information any time in the future. This information becomes part of your business profile that everyone can see and which will promote your business. If you want to be more involved in marketing, recruitment, member events, or advocacy, we welcome it, but you don't have to invest time if you don't want to. We have a Board and Committee for volunteer opportunities, but there is no requirement other than to promote LOCAL.

Q. How does the group make decisions?

A. We have a Board (see brochure or website) and they meet monthly to set the agenda and make decisions. We used to have all the members attend in the past but it became cumbersome and inefficient. The Board is doing a good job of considering options, discussing what is in the best interest of local businesses, and making decisions to lead the organization. All members are welcome to attend any Board meeting.

Q. Are there networking opportunities within the group?

A. YES! We have gatherings to share ideas. The website also has a *Member Only Forum* to discuss topics that are current for small business and helpful for businesses just getting started. The group has networked in the past about the 'no plastic bags' impact, employee relations issues, health insurance changes, where to source ingredients, taxes, software recommendations, and all sorts of issues. Friendships are built among members and many casual conversations lead to business building and troubleshooting ideas to help each other out.

Q. What do I need to do to join?

A. Log on to <http://www.uniqueeugene.com> and click on [Join Us!](#) The website will walk you through the steps and you can pay with PayPal or a Credit Card. It should only take a few minutes. There is a Member Profile and this is shared with other members and some of information is in the Business Directory business listing. You can always add to or edit your profile. Please put at least the basics in here to get started sharing your story.

Q. I am an individual and don't have a business but I believe in local and want to join.

A. Terrific! We have a membership for individual community advocates. For a small annual fee we will keep you informed about issues and opportunities to support LOCAL businesses. [Click here](#) to join as an individual!

Q. What do Annual Membership fees get used for?

A. We invest in marketing the Buy LOCAL message through participation in events and through advertising. Currently we are a all volunteer organization. Our goal is to hire a part time staff person to be working on getting our message out and promoting LOCAL Independents every day.

Q. Have Membership fees changed over the years and when did they most recently change?

A. They used to be quite a bit higher before we switched from a advertising co-operative to a 501(c)3 Independent Business Alliance (IBA). We brought the fees down considerably so that smaller organizations could afford to be members and with the hopes that we will grow to over 200 members. Now we base the annual membership on number of full time equivalent (FTE) employees, starting at \$.66/day for the businesses with 0-10 employees. We anticipate *no increases in fees* for the foreseeable future. There may be opportunities to 'buy in' to additional marketing opportunities - for specific ads and events, and these would be in addition to the annual fee...but they are optional.

Q. I see you are a member of a national organization [AMIBA](#) - what do they provide?

A. The movement to let consumers know why 'Buying LOCAL' is important is happening in hundreds of communities across the country. We are a member of AMIBA because they offer our group best practices on running effective 'buy local' campaigns and running efficient Independent Business Alliances. It has been a very helpful and affordable investment in our success.

Q. Where can I learn more about why supporting Local is important?

A. Thank you for asking! We have some information on our website. The American Independent Business Alliance (AMIBA) has a [great resource list of articles and studies](#). And, the [Institute for Local Self Reliance](#) (ILSR) has outstanding research on the impact of Independent Business on the economy of communities. Some of the content overlaps between AMIBA and ILSR, and our website.

Q. What does Unique Eugene do to Give Back to the Community?

A. We are evolving our giving program in this new IBA structure. The following article is a great recap of what we've done in the past. Each of the members invests in several local non-profits, and we intend to revise our Unique Eugene organizational donations over this next year and streamline it to ensure it is relevant to the members.

The Back-story about Unique Eugene - [as written by Chelsea of AMIBA](#):

Eugene is home to an eclectic mix of independent businesses that help make the city enveloping Oregon's Willamette River a distinctive and memorable destination. But with increasing competition from chains, online giants, and other remote businesses, Eugene merchants realized the necessity of collaborating to preserve their livelihoods and Eugene's independent character. In 1999 a collection of retailers, spearheaded by Paul Nicholson, owner of Paul's Bicycle Way of Life, formed Unique Eugene to help local, independent businesses share ideas, collaborate and better promote themselves as a cohesive unit. The formative concept was simple: good things will happen if people who own local businesses get together and work on common goals. Unique Eugene is now in a transitional phase as it shifts from a small merchants association to the larger, more broadly inclusive Eugene Independent Businesses Alliance (EIBA). Despite the formal name change, EIBA will retain the Unique Eugene brand for community outreach. Unique Eugene leaders anticipate that building a more

diverse business membership will help spread the pro-local business message more broadly throughout the community and expand funding opportunities. unique-eugene-gift-certificates. Despite the transition, some aspects of Unique Eugene will continue to thrive, including the community giving program that supports local schools and nonprofits. Unique Eugene gift certificates, redeemable at any member business, exemplify the organization's focus on strengthening partnerships and community philanthropy. Unique Eugene sells the gift certificates at a reduced rate (and sometimes donates them) to schools and nonprofits. Recipients sell the gift certificates at face value and retain the profit for their organization or use them in other ways to generate support, such as in silent auctions or as door prizes. As one example, Unique Eugene donated \$1,000 worth of gift certificates to the local transportation system's "drive less challenge" to be used as a grand prize. Unique Eugene also supports local education through its Lane Community College scholarship. Each year for five years the organization donated \$2,000 to support students studying sustainability and business. The gift certificate program characterizes the organization's two-pronged approach of encouraging residents to buy local and showing thanks to a city that keeps local businesses thriving. Dwight Collins, from Newman's Fish Company, expressed his excitement about Unique Eugene's community involvement, saying, "Members of Unique Eugene realize how important it is to help the community continue to grow in a healthy way. The more we can pool our resources together, the more we can influence the greater community."

Unique Eugene will continue to succeed by keeping the community aware of why buying locally matters and encouraging people to think critically about where their dollars are spent. They produced several TV and print ads to convey their message, which also is reinforced in the group's community giving programs. Unique Eugene also spread their message by participating in the Eugene Celebration parade, winning awards more than two years in a row for best community group. The parade personified Eugene's quirky spirit, and Unique Eugene members fit right in, dancing behind the band in fish and vegetable costumes that represented their own businesses. As the group engineers their future, Unique Eugene members have drawn enormous inspiration from fellow AMIBA affiliates and the large library of affiliates' program templates through AMIBA. Collins cited materials that assist with growing membership, obtaining non-profit status and creating a paid position within the organization as helpful in establishing EIBA's new organizational structure. (All materials are available to AMIBA affiliates in Member Resources.) Eugene is quirky and unique, something Unique Eugene will continue to value as it evolves into a more formal Independent Business Alliance. Whereas in the past the organization focused more on promoting individual member businesses, leaders see this transition as a more holistic approach to generating community support and passion for the buy local campaign. Says Collins, "Now we don't need to spend so much time helping each person advertise; [instead we] need to get the buy local message out. That's a big transition that we're going through."

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