Over the weekend, we were talking with a friend who works at a retail store about Black Friday—our new national holiday for shopping mania. She was telling us about how crazy people get—even up here, far from the big cities.

The megastores are trying to undercut one another again this year. Walmart is starting its Black Friday at 8 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. Too bad if their employees had been looking forward to some quality family time centered around Mr. Tom Turkey and several NFL games.

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And Walmart's not the only one. Everyone is jumping the gun. Maybe if you get to the store early in the morning on Friday, you are hopelessly behind the times and doomed to gaze sadly at aisles and aisles of empty shelves that once contained the items consumed by the locusts who swarmed in at the stroke of 8.

It's madness. It's not Thanksgiving. Remember when stores were closed on Thanksgiving so people could spend time with their families? Times—and priorities— sure have changed.

Here is something else to think about, and it is a lot more positive, far from the big stores and the mania and the madness. You don't even have to skip the turkey dinner or get up really early.

It takes place this Saturday, Nov. 24, and it is called Small Business Saturday. Think small—and support the local stores who are run by your neighbors and friends and who employ other neighbors and friends—the heart of our local communities.

The keystone to every local economy is its small and local businesses. So think small—and local. Think for a moment about the local businesses you are always visiting. And think about the empty storefronts. Times have sure changed here, too.

None of the factors behind our local struggles can be easily solved. But all of us can help in our own little way by supporting our local businesses—the businesses in Iron River and Crystal Falls and elsewhere in Iron County.

Think about it. We depend very much on the services and goods that are available here. The groceries. The drug stores. The restaurants. The auto service center that changes your oil and fixes your brakes. The gas stations. The place where the ladies get their hair done, and the men get their hair cut. The area hardware store, where you go for furnace filters and paint and bird seed. And yes, your local newspaper.

We all need these services—badly! We all depend on them and assume that they will always be there when we need them.

But will they be there? If they are going to survive and thrive, they need us, too. They need our patronage and support. They need us to spend money with them so they can pay their utilities and their taxes and their employees. Maybe add another person to the staff so everybody doesn't have to work such long hours.

Isn't that more important than saving 10 cents a can on dog food at some mega mart 50 miles away that treats its employees like dirt? And don't forget: Shopping local saves on gas.

This Christmas season, think about our businesses and about our area. We all need to get our cars and trucks serviced. How about buying a coupon for an oil change? We need to buy food, right? Get a gift card from the store. A gift certificate from the restaurant or the jewelers or the hardware store or the beautician or the lawn care business. You can see where we're going with this.

We are all in this together, and we all have a stake in the health and success of our local

businesses. That is why it is important for us to Shop Small.
Not just this Saturday. All the time. This is our home, after all.
--Peter Nocerini