

York businesses benefit through this new local shopper app. Here's how

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Small business owners in York County can look forward to even more satisfied customers as the Office of Economic Development announces its new partnership with Retail Alliance.

Retail Alliance is a nonprofit trade association in Hampton Roads that serves local business through education and advocacy about how shopping local impacts a community, according to the organization's website.

In 2014, the organization created the program LOVEVA, an app that allows shoppers to collect rewards when they shop at participating local businesses, according to a news release from York County.

"You can shop at one store and get rewarded at another—that makes it really unique," said Kylie Ross Sibert, vice president of corporate communications for Retail Alliance. "The app really is banding together businesses across Hampton Roads. I haven't seen another app that lets you do that."

This partnership comes as an addition to York County's existing campaign, "Keep It In York County," which will now merge into a regional buy-local effort in Hampton Roads, according to the news release.

To list a business with the app, local owners have to pay a \$145 fee. This opportunity has been available to York County businesses previously but only about half were participating. Through the partnership, the county hopes to encourage greater numbers by offering a grant to pay for half of the listing fee for each business.

Former board member with Retail Alliance and owner of Simply Unique Jewelry, Tim Wright, has participated in the program before and found that the cost is worth the reward. In his experience, he has been able to offer rewards to customers such as \$25 off any service or product through the app.

In offering the app as a resource for York County businesses, owners will have access to opportunities that are typically out of reach for small businesses. Now, participants can provide a loyalty program, a directory of local businesses, and have access to metrics to measure marketing success with the app.

"Rather than duplicating efforts in individual localities—each with its own buy-local program, website and marketing efforts—LOVEVA allows us work smarter and make a bigger impact collectively," said Jim Noel, economic development director for the county.

The program also benefits shoppers by offering a one-stop location for finding local businesses. On the program's website, shoppers can see how buying locally directly impacts them and their community as well as find information on local events, sales and specials.

To qualify as local and participate, businesses must:

- Be owned locally and independently.
- Made business decisions locally.
- Be headquartered locally.
- Originate in Hampton Roads.
- Be privately held

For more information, visit [LOVEVA](#) or [The Retail Alliance](#) online.

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