In Sam We Trust Essay, Research Paper

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When Sam Walton opened the first Wal-Mart store in 1962 in Rogers, Arkansas, it was the beginning of an amazing success story. At its heart, Wal-Mart is a place where prices are low, and value and customer service are high every day. Since then Wal-Mart has become the world s number one retailer with over 2,500 stores worldwide. With this expansion, Wal-Mart has also been the receiver of negativity from small town business owners and aggressive Wal-Mart activists. These people claim that Wal-Mart s main goal is to increase their bottom line no matter what the cost. They believe that Wal-Mart is stealing American hometown identity, pushing the local businesses into bankruptcy, and in return, giving nothing back to the community. However, this perception has been wrongly justified. Another grand opening is not the main goal of this discount store. Best stated by Walton in his acceptance speech for the Medal of Freedom, the goal of Wal-Mart is to lower the cost of living for everyone, not just in America, but to give the world an opportunity to see what it s like to save and have a better lifestyle, a better life for all ( Wal-Mart Online 1).

Many small towns across America fight the expansion of Wal-Mart. They believe that this store will be the downfall of their rural lifestyle. A well know opposer of Wal-Mart, Albert Norman, stresses the impact of this store on small town quality life. According to Norman, Wal-Mart forces its way into a town to capture its gains from other merchants. Another activist, Bob Ortega insists that Wal-Mart is disrupting local communities and small town character is being lost (Ban the Bargains 205). However, this is not the case. Coming from a rural town, I have witnessed first hand the effects that Wal-Mart has on small town quality life. Without a Wal-Mart present the small community of Franklin has undergone many changes of businesses and has experienced losses of ownership in the last five years. Three businesses have closed their doors and there is no merchandiser stealing the sales. These failures were simply due to the lack of management or lack of need for these items. In the outskirts of another rural town, an hour drive from my own, there is a Wal-Mart present. This particular town is a historic landmark and it s buildings and people reflect that heritage. At first glance one would not notice the convenience hidden at the edge of town, but the opportunities this store has brought to the community are endless and have in no way deteriorated from the towns image. According to Wal-Mart president David Glass, Wal-Mart shares the concern for and commitment to the people and issues they face in each of our communities ( Americans Say 1). Backing the hometown flavor, Wal-Mart s system allows each store to customize the merchandise assortment to match the communities needs. They also incorporate the hometown identity by displaying locally made merchandise and hosting bake sales for local charities ( Company 1-2). In fact, the three basic beliefs of Wal-Mart are the backbone to small town lifestyle: respect for the individual, service to the customer and each other, and striving for excellence ( Wal-Mart Online 2).

Another point that activists use against Wal-Mart is that local merchandisers cannot compete with this discount store. According to Johnston in Who s Really the Villain, local merchants can survive by simply adjusting their business practices. These stores simply need to provide better service and a more specialized inventory (224). Combining this with the merchants of my hometown, the businesses that are currently thriving would have no threat if a Wal-Mart were to be built in their vicinity. The local pharmacy offers delivery to the shut-ins and to the hospital across the street, the local computer store holds free classes and offers lifetime repairs to all items bought at their store, and the grocery store has a farmers market every Saturday. These are all attributes that diversify and fill special needs of the community and things that Wal-Mart does not offer to its customers. These small differences are the key to a business s survival. In her essay, Johnston shows examples of these same strongholds that business owners have implemented with successful results (224). Another way to ensure success is by studying and practicing Kenneth Stone s tips in Competing with the Discount Mass Merchandiser (209-216). According to Stone, if a merchandiser practices the merchandise, marketing, service, and customer relations tips located in this essay, while continually improving the efficiency of the business, your business will be able to compete against and mass merchandiser.

Norman also argues that Wal-Mart gives very little back to the community outside of one high school scholarship per year (208). The contributions Wal-Mart has given the community and nation strongly disagree with this statement. Their involvement in programs of economic development, education, and environmental education largely back and aide the community. Wal-Mart contributes approximately 4.5 million in grants and scholarships to the community each year, not to mention the 127 million to corporate sponsorships ( Wal-Mart Data 1). Wal-Mart is the main contributor to the Children s Miracle Network, which assists children s hospitals across the United States and Canada. Since 1988, Wal-Mart has given more that $91 million to 165 Children s Miracle Network hospitals ( Discount City 1). The local high school scholarship provided by Wal-Mart has greatly contributed to the community of Franklin and the dreams of one student in particular. Without this scholarship, a fellow classmate did not have the funding or the income to attend collage. This contribution not only allowed him to attend collage, but also to have the opportunity of a better life. Along with these gracious contributions, Wal-Mart also provides the youth of the area an opportunity for employment. In my hometown, there are approximately 10 available jobs for students looking for summer or evening work. Those that are not blessed with these minimum wage jobs are forced to rely on parent s income for their recreation. According to Johnston, Wal-Mart would bring 240 tax-paying jobs to a community (222). Because Wal-Mart is a 24-hour convenience store and hires mostly part-time employees, they are ideal for after school, and summer jobs for students. The opportunities Wal-Mart brings to the youth of the small town is only one way that this store strives to better the community. Wal-Mart is also actively involved in educating the community about recycling and other environmental topics and providing money and man power for fund raisers benefiting schools, churches, Boy and Girl Scouts, park projects, police and fire charities, food banks, and senior citizens ( Wal-Mart Data 2).

There is no doubt that the lifestyle created by Wal-Mart has changed many things along its path. However, these changes have largely benefited the community, not detracted from it. The opportunities this discount store has presented to small towns across America are endless. Students have the opportunities for jobs and scholarships for college, children are largely supported, and the community is backed and aided by this store. Furthermore, the discount prices offer a better lifestyle to those who could not afford it otherwise. Despite the negative attacks on this mass merchandiser, Wal-Mart has greatly aided small-towns across America and has brought hope and life back to the community, a better life for all.

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