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News Release

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Franchot Encourages Residents To Shop Maryland For The Holidays

Retailers, restaurants, credit unions come together to announce a new "loyalty rewards" initiative for buying local

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (October 26, 2020) - Comptroller Peter Franchot, along with partners from the retail and restaurant industries, today kicked off the annual *Shop Maryland for the Holidays* campaign with a virtual press conference to announce a new "buy local" initiative.

Some Maryland-based credit unions are offering rewards points to their members that shop at local businesses from now until the end of the year. Those purchases will be tracked through credit card transactions. Each credit union has determined their own system for how they're rewarding members who shop local.

"Small businesses have been decimated over the course of this pandemic and I'm thrilled that Maryland credit unions are stepping up to promote our annual Shop Maryland for the Holidays campaign and incentivize buying from local retailers," said Comptroller Franchot. "Holiday sales can dictate whether a business survives and this year especially, they're depending on support from local customers to keep the lights on."

Credit unions have also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but have helped provide loans and deferments to small businesses, so participating in the Shop Maryland for the Holidays campaign is a natural progression.

"Credit unions share the same deep commitment to community as local retailers," said John Bratsakis, president and CEO of the MD | DC Credit Union Association. "We recognize that for many Maryland merchants who are struggling, this is a

make-or-break holiday season. As shoppers decide where to spend their hard-earned money, area credit unions are providing incentives to buy local such as increased rewards points and lower rates, in addition to their current credit card offerings. We want to thank the Maryland Comptroller's Office and area credit unions for collaborating on this initiative to help jumpstart the local economy by supporting the businesses that are the heart and soul of our communities.”

The state's largest credit union, State Employees Credit Union (SECU), with more than a quarter of a million members, is among those participating in the rewards program.

"Local businesses are the engine of our economy, and now more than ever, it's important to support the retail owners who have continued to sustain our local economy and provide services to our communities across the state during the pandemic," said Dave Sweiderk, president and CEO at SECU Maryland. "As the state's largest credit union, we are thrilled to work alongside the Maryland Comptroller's Office and MD|DC Credit Union Association to identify ways to support small businesses, such as doubling credit card points to reward our 260,000 members for purchasing local."

Several credit unions are joining SECU in offering increased rewards for shopping locally this holiday season, including:

- Five Star of MD Federal Credit Union
- Market USA Federal Credit Union
- Atlantic Financial Federal Credit Union
- DOLFCU
- GPOFCU
- Chessie FCU

Other credit union partners will be promoting Shop Maryland for the Holidays without expanding their existing rewards programs. They include: Central Credit Union of Maryland, Educational Systems FCU, FRB Federal Credit Union, Transportation FCU and Point Breeze Credit Union. Check the [Comptroller's website](#) for updated offers from our partners.

The Maryland Retailers Association has been emphasizing that its members take necessary measures -- and often taking extra precautions -- to make shoppers feel safe so they can come into their businesses, if they choose.

“It is more important than ever to support your local businesses that have been hit the hardest by COVID shutdowns," said Cailey Locklair, the association's president. "These businesses have done everything in their power to create a safe environment for you to shop in and need your business!”

Business owners are finding new ways to pitch their products and have heavily

relied on online sales to replace in-store foot traffic, but smaller, independent stores are on the brink and a poor holiday season could be devastating.

"It's never been more important to support local businesses," said Claudia Towles, owner of aMuse Toys. "Operating our businesses in this global pandemic offers nothing more than uncertainty. We need our communities to step up and shop local this holiday season. You either buy local or say goodbye to local businesses."

Many restaurants also are struggling to stay afloat. The warmer weather did allow for outdoor dining to help prop up revenues, but with winter approaching, that option will not be possible for many restaurants. Indoor distancing requirements and capacity limits, and the anticipated lost revenues from canceled holiday parties and catered meals has that industry eager for any help they can get in the months ahead.

"Restaurants provide an essential service and are the backbone of every community," said Marshall Weston, president & CEO of the Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM). "They are dedicated to their employees by offering first jobs and careers with advancement opportunities, dedicated to their customers by providing exceptional dining options and service, and dedicated to their community by supporting local charities, youth sports teams and events. No community is complete without the restaurants that bring it all together and supporting them during the holidays is critical to keep them from closing permanently."

Kelly O'Brien, the chair of the RAM Board of Directors who owns restaurants in Largo and Frederick, is hopeful that local customers recognize this and will try to spend their dollars at local eateries during the holiday season.

"Supporting local restaurants, like mine, during the holidays is extremely important," O'Brien said. "I encourage people to purchase restaurant gift cards, take advantage of carryout options and dine in to help local restaurants remain open and keep their employees working."

For more information on shopping local and for how to contact your credit union to find out how they're participating in the rewards program, click on the [Comptroller of Maryland website](#) and click on Comptroller Initiatives. Easily downloadable graphics to post on social media and hang in store windows are also available.

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