

TOWN SQUARE: 10 WAYS TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES THIS HOLIDAY

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By Jason Gleason

With restrictions in place and more challenges ahead, this is the most challenging holiday season ever for our downtown shops and restaurants.

But as Kristen Zachares of The Eclectic Chic Boutique said, "I've learned it's important to make the best of things and maximize what you can do."

And, wow, our businesses are definitely maximizing whatever they can. The hand sanitizers are at the door, appointments are being made, curbside pickup is available, and there are even delivery options. Everyone is trying new things to make the holiday season safe, successful and fun.

I don't need to explain the challenges of this year – and how we are all hoping for an end to this pandemic in 2021. But in order for us to have a lively community of shops and restaurants with us next year, we need your support now. Every year, we ask you to shop local and shop small. But now it's more important than ever.

10 IDEAS

1. **Come out on Shop Small Saturday, Nov. 28.** Even though Shop Small Saturday may look a little different this year, many of our businesses will be encouraging sidewalk shopping with merchandise outside. “The weather should be good, and it’s a great way to shop right now,” said Jeff Beck of East Side Mags. The Montclair Orchestra will be performing on Church Street, and we will be giving out free one-day parking permits with proof of downtown purchase (first come, first served).
2. **Get your turkey done right.** Even if you love to cook, it’s a hard time to shop at grocery stores and get all the specialty items you may want for stuffing and desserts. Many of our restaurants are doing spectacular Thanksgiving takeaway packages with gourmet touches that save you the cooking and the shopping. Some of our restaurants are also taking reservations for the big day. Check out our social media — Facebook and Instagram — for the latest updates.
3. **Gift cards for beauty and wellness.** Montclair Center has dozens of spas, studios and salons to accommodate every taste and preference. A gift card to a day spa, massage, blowout, yoga class, meditation session or manicure is a terrific stocking stuffer for a friend.
4. **Come out to shop on Thursday nights.** Many of our shops are staying open later on Thursday nights to help maximize super-busy work-at-home and remote-schooling schedules.
5. **Make a shopping appointment, order online or arrange for curbside pickup.** Our shops want to help you get gifts for everyone on your list safely. Options include individual shopping appointments, curbside pickup options and even delivery.
6. **Re-post, share and save.** One of the best ways to help our businesses is to follow your favorites on social media and re-post and share. Help them reach more people with their holiday specials. Re-posting, sharing and saving helps the businesses reach more people organically. Every little bit helps.
7. **Take advantage of free two-hour metered parking.** Thanks to the efforts of the Mayor and Township Council, there will be two hours of free parking at meters throughout Montclair from Black Friday through Dec. 26. This is a perfect time to check out a new boutique or restaurant that you haven’t tried yet.
8. **Leave a great review.** Your favorite salons, restaurants and shops really depend on positive feedback on Yelp, Facebook and Google reviews. Take a few minutes today to leave some good reviews for your go-to lunches, classes and services.
9. **Sign up for a class.** Fitness studios are offering distanced and online programs. You can even support downtown by taking online craft classes, drawing classes and more with our many local businesses.
10. **Take a walk.** If you haven’t already, pick up a drink to go, take a walk downtown and check out all the new art exhibitions. Our partnership with Fresh Air Montclair has resulted in art installations in windows all over downtown. Learn more at freshairmontclair.com.

And one extra ...

11. **Follow us.** Keep up with all the offers and news from our downtown community by following our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts, all at @montclaircenter. Sign up for our newsletter at montclaircenter.com.

We look forward to welcoming you downtown this holiday season. On behalf of all of us at Montclair Center, I wish everyone a safe, healthy and happy holiday and look forward to the happiest of new years.

Jason Gleason is the executive director of the Montclair Center Business Improvement District, representing the 300 businesses and 200 property owners of downtown. Learn more at montclaircenter.com.