

Faces & Places: Where the Sidewalk Begins - A Twist On A Classic

For twenty-seven years the Salem-Keizer Education Foundation operated on kitchen tables, in coffee shops and was carried around in tote bags. Three years ago Tyke Hagedorn sat down to lunch with Krina Lemons, and that is where the sidewalk began.

Krina Lemons (the Executive Director of SKEF) had recently received the opportunity to rent a space in downtown Salem. Because of the owner's commitment to serving kids SKEF would get a deal on rent they couldn't refuse. The back of this downtown space would be the new home of SKEF's offices. The front of the space, although small, was open and inviting. What this space would be used for had yet to be determined—a tutoring center, or more offices perhaps? What about an ice cream parlor? Over lunch that day Tyke, as former Nordstrom executive, and Krina, as businesswoman and non-profit leader, hatched a plan. The space would be used for retail, but not just any retail shop. "Where the Sidewalk Begins"—a twist on Shel Silverstein's famous poem—would feature local products of all kinds, a smoothie bar, and most importantly, all of its proceeds would go to support the students of Salem-Keizer via the Education Foundation.

In these tough economic times fiscal sustainability is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue. Afterschool programs across the state are seeing a decrease in funding—both public and private sources—while at the same time their communities need what they offer even more. The Salem-Keizer community is no different. The School District continues to face funding cuts, and the poverty level continues to rise. The Salem-Keizer Education Foundation has stepped up in this time of need by providing high-quality afterschool programs in twenty-two Salem-Keizer schools; operating arts programs, Lego Robotics, wrestling and volleyball leagues and tournaments; offering tutoring services; giving out \$40,000 in innovation grants to teachers thinking outside the box and much more. SKEF is not immune, however, to the same funding challenges our state is facing. The decrease of public funding sources (specifically a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant), has forced SKEF to develop unique strategies to achieve fiscal sustainability.

([Click Here](#) for more information on the Uncertain Times faced by afterschool across the nation)

Where the Sidewalk Begins is a key strategy of SKEF's sustainability plan. As an AmeriCorps Volunteer in Service to America last year I worked with the Salem-Keizer Education Foundation to go through a sustainability planning process, the result of which was a strong plan with many strategies, which will ultimately lead to fiscal sustainability. Living in Salem and working with SKEF last year, I walked through the storefront countless times. Entering the store and spending time with people like Tyke and Krina, you realize—this is so much more than a retail space.

Where the Sidewalk Begins is more than just a source of earned income for SKEF—it is a gateway to the community. It supports not only the sustainability of the Education Foundation, but of the Salem-Keizer community as a whole. I spent some time with Tyke a few days ago, when I asked her how she chooses the products for the storefront; she began by talking about the feel of the store. “I don’t want it to be ostentatious. The Foundation serves the entirety of the Salem-Keizer community, which means the storefront should be accessible to all of Salem-Keizer.” Tyke prefers to stock products made right in Salem-Keizer by local artisans, if that’s not possible she chooses those made in the Northwest or those who support social causes. An example of this is a t-shirt company called Break the Chain. Break the Chain produces t-shirts with anti-bullying and other social statements on them. The product itself sends a message, and the profits go to support organizations promoting social good like anti-bullying organization Hands Are Not for Hurting. The bottom-line of Where the Sidewalk Begins is not its profit; the bottom-line is its impact.

Community impact as the essential focus does not prevent the storefront from fiscal success rather it enhances it. After only three years of operation the storefront is in the black, and contributing to the fiscal sustainability of SKEF—two years ahead of schedule. By focusing on community relationships and giving back to support Salem-Keizer, Salem-Keizer is choosing to support the storefront. It’s a symbiotic relationship.

I asked Tyke during our conversation if she had any advice for initiatives looking to develop creative ways to achieve fiscal sustainability. Her response: “Be good to your community, and they will be good to you. Love your volunteers, focus on the relationships you’re building, and don’t discount community members that may not have direct ties to the school system—some of SKEF’s biggest supporters are people without children. Reach out to your community; try to work at a local level, because if you support your community, they will support you.”

Like its name, the storefront is a twist on a classic. Most retail spaces are simply shops that need supporting selling gifts and trinkets. Where the Sidewalk Begins is a shop yes, but having an adjusted bottom line—a goal first and foremost of supporting its community—means it is also a community space and organization. Where the Sidewalk Begins gathers support through its support of others by featuring local artisans, purchasing from local businesses, participating in community events and supporting its schools in countless ways. Focusing on more than finances contributes to the fiscal sustainability of the organization. Where the Sidewalk Begins is a gateway to the community for SKEF. It is a creative, interesting and fun approach to sustaining a critical service in tough economic times.