

Press Republican  
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BLOG ENTRY

## Shedding some light on Black Friday

“In a consumer society there are inevitably two kinds of slaves: the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy.” Ivan Illich

Black Friday. It sounds ominous ... and it is.

We live in a consumer society where "buying" is given more weight than "doing" and "making."

But on Black Friday, our already out-of-balance consumer culture spins into ridiculous excess. Thanksgiving used to be about family, food and football. Now the day is just a convenient breather during our new holiday, "Black Friday Week."

So, what to do? How about some anti-consumer consumerism.

Here's a few green gift ideas that will keep you out of the malls.

Miller's Popcorn. This Amish-grown popcorn, packaged in Brushton, isn't widely available. You can get it at Alix's Hardware in Chateaugay and Plattsburgh, Yando's in Malone and a few other outlets.

Miller's is good popcorn. What makes it green is the fact it is real popcorn.

Popcorn is a great snack. For less than \$3, using almost no packaging or waste, you can make bushels of popcorn. All you need is a big covered pot, a bit of oil and, if you like, a stick of butter. It only takes a few minutes to make a batch. Here's a good and simple recipe.

Microwave popcorn, on the other hand, is a an environmental disaster: chemically processed, over priced, over packaged and dangerous to manufacturer. If those arguments aren't enough for you, think of the fake butter taste and gagging smell.

So buy a bag of Miller's popcorn, or some other real popcorn and, if you want to create a complete gift, throw in a large saucepan and a copy of the recipe.

Black%20Friday%20Holiday%20\_Down.jpg

Adirondack Council Carbon Reduction Certificate. For \$25 you can permanently retire three tons of carbon. But since carbon dioxide is so hard to wrap, you'll instead receive a personalized certificate in the name of the your gift recipient.

Yes, this gift is a bit abstract. But the environmental impact through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative is direct. The RGGI is a precursor to the federal carbon cap and trade program, which Congress is struggling to pass. But enough states are now cooperating in regional programs that even without the feds your \$25 goes directly to carbon reduction.

Reusable water bottle. I wrote about the environmental benefits of reusable water bottles in my last blog. Drinking tap water is healthy, cheaper, nearly waste-free and far less stressful on the environment than buying water bottles.

I recommend a bottle that opens wide for cleaning and has smaller top for convenient sips. You can find water bottles at local stores and food co-ops, in addition to large chain stores.

Local media environment. When you think of protecting the environment you probably think of the natural environment. But of course, the word "environment" has many meanings. When you say "environment" you may mean your world, your nation, your neighborhood or your home.

But there are other environments we exist in. On Black Friday, we can talk about a "consumer environment": the ways you buy the things you need. Shopping at local stores and buying local products helps preserve that local consumer environment.

We also exist in a media environment -- TV, radio, newspapers, movies. And with the Internet, our media environment has expanded dramatically.

Here are two ways you can protect your local media environment and do some holiday shopping at the same time.

North Country Public Radio. This is my favorite radio station. NCPR provides a great mix news, talk and music. The station broadcasts throughout the North Country and does great reporting on local issues.

How do you tuck NCPR into a Christmas stocking? How about a pledge/membership in someone's name? Depending on the support-level you choose, you can get them a "member card" with discounts at local restaurants.

Press-Republican. Is it self-serving to suggest a Press-Republican subscription as a holiday gift? Yes. But you have to admit, a local newspaper is a critical component in any media environment. No other media organization has the resources to cover local news like a hometown paper. And for only cents a day you get everything from local opinion, calendars, obits and comics to advice, horoscope and sudoku.

Yes, we use power and paper. But newspaper is highly recyclable and, if the paper-use bothers you, follow us on to the Internet.

These are just a couple green Black Friday ideas ... ideas you can carry forward into the holiday-shopping season. Have some more ideas? Let me know.

And when the Black Friday mood grabs you, ask yourself: Do you want to live your life spending, or spend your life living.

Posted by Jack Downs on November 27, 2009 10:59 AM