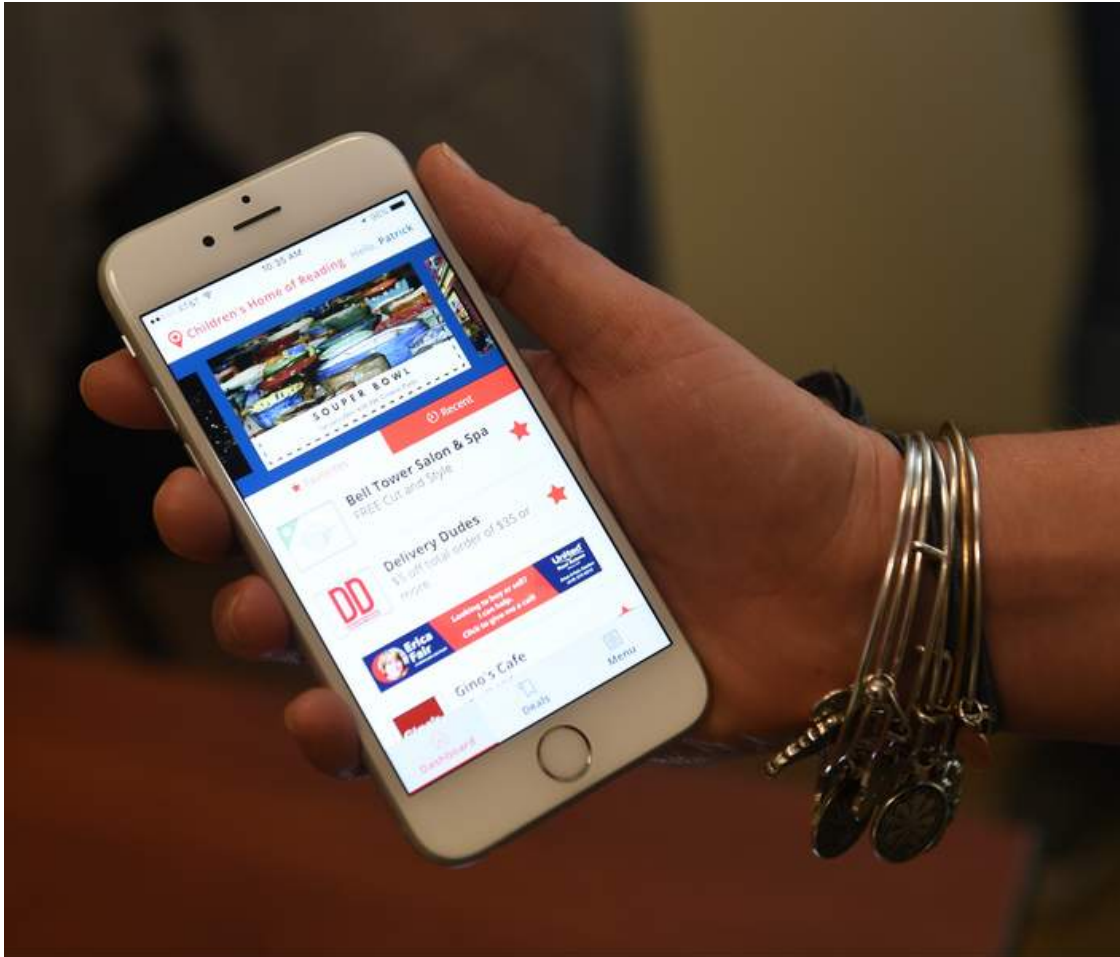


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Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy | The Do It Local app connects community members to local charities and businesses.

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Do It Local app connects Berks businesses, charities and consumers

The app was developed by Heather and Patrick Brady of Mohnton.

WRITTEN BY BY COURTNEY H. DIENER-STOKES - READING EAGLE CORRESPONDENT

About Do It Local

How Do It Local describes itself:

"Do It Local is a community-focused app that makes getting discounts at your favorite local restaurants and businesses easier than ever. Easily shop local, eat local and play local with money-saving deals at your fingertips. Do It Local will be adding new deals throughout the year, so make sure you check the app daily for event and deal updates!

"Launched in Berks County in a world that turns to mobile phones and devices to make all of life's daily decisions — What's for dinner? Where can I get a unique gift? What are we going to do today? — the Do It Local app provides categorized lists of community favorites to simplify your life.

"Do It Local gives back to the community — it's a way for organizations to work together as a team to raise necessary funds while supporting local businesses. Enjoy awesome deals while discovering new local hot spots with pride! Everyone benefits when communities buy local, support local and truly do it all local!"

Source: www.doitlocalapp.com (<https://doitlocalapp.com/>)

For more information:

Do It Local: www.doitlocalapp.com (<https://doitlocalapp.com/>), www.doitlocalfundraising.com (<http://www.doitlocalfundraising.com>) **Jump Start Incubator:** www.jumpstartberks.org (<http://jumpstartberks.org/>)

READING, PA —

When Heather Brady of Mohnton worked in corporate advertising with national clients, she loved what she did but increasingly felt the urge to connect with local businesses.

"I found myself meeting with businesses that couldn't afford advertising, and I would say, 'You have so much passion and you are truly a local hero and you risked everything to open this to share your passions with the community,'" Brady said. "My heart was pulling me to be in touch with local business owners."

She decided to follow her heart when the time was right.

"As soon as I started a family, I found this new appreciation of getting to know the local business owners," said Brady, who has a 3-year-old son with her husband, Patrick.

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She also wanted to figure out a way to support local charities that are always in need of funds.

"I realized I needed to figure out this true passion I have for connecting the dots and helping each other," she said. "I found a niche to pull together local small guys and charities, and I just needed my own medium."

Heather and Patrick realized an app would be the answer.

"It is a new kind of communication between the charity and those who support the charity," she said.

Their app, called Do It Local, launched last spring, was first centered on businesses and charities in Berks County and is in the process of expanding into Lehigh, Bucks and Lancaster counties, and even as far as North Carolina.

As part of a Jump Start Incubator, their office is located in the Berks Community Foundation building, 237 Court St.

"The Incubator program is great," Heather said. "You get to use their board rooms and conference rooms and have meetings."

She said 90 percent of what they do for the day-to-day functioning and maintenance of the app is handled online.

"The rest, I get out in the community and truly be a part of it and do the fun stuff and dive into the charities and fundraising events," she said.

Drive funds to local charities

The purpose of their app is to drive funds to local charities.

"Each one of the charities gets their own personalized app," Heather said. "It's a way to reach people. If the Opportunity House needs someone to make dinner one night, they can advertise it on there - it's a way for them to reach people."

How the charity gets money by being a Do It Local partner is through an annual membership fee: As a member you pay an annual fee of \$25, and the charities of your choice who are partners of Do It Local will receive \$15 from that fee.

"It's an easy way to give a little something more to the charities and get something back year after year," she said.

Some of Do It Local's charity partners, aside from Opportunity House, include the American Cancer Society of Berks County, the Animal Rescue League of Berks County and more recently, the BIG Vision Foundation.

"The Animal Rescue League is a big one," she said, "They have a lot of members and supporters. They have 30,000 Facebook fans and a big email base."

Kate Alley, vice president of marketing and development at Opportunity House, feels the app gives local businesses a chance to compete in a marketplace driven by national chains.

"It's a simple way to support the community you live and work in," Alley said. "It's a win-win situation for everyone."

Members reap benefits

For the member, the charity you choose will be the one you have supported for the the year, and then in return, you get to reap the benefit of all of the deals offered by local businesses on the app.

"It's not like a Groupon," Heather said. "It's more like AAA where you have a membership and you get deals with that membership."

Among the 110 deals available through a Do It Local membership are Beverly Hills Tavern, Spring Township, and Kog Hill Winery, Caernarvon Township. Advertisers on the site offering deals are charged an affordable set-up fee.

"They are offering \$5 off of \$25," Brady said of Beverly Hills Tavern. "We also just added a skin sanctuary spa where you can get a free foot scrub with the purchase of a Swedish massage. One of my favorites is Kog Hill Winery, where you get a free wine tasting."

You can even get a discount at a farm stand at the Fairgrounds Farmers Market in Muhlenberg Township.

"Hooper Produce is 20 percent off," she said. "At So Good Soups (also at the market), you buy two quarts of soup and get one free."

One of the most popular deals is from a Wyomissing-based business.

"At Bell Tower you can get a free haircut - that is a favorite," Heather said.

Robin Schappell, guest services manager at Bell Tower, Salon & Spa, said the Do It Local app is a wonderful avenue to benefit local businesses and entrepreneurs.

"With the ever-changing habits of consumers, it's a great way to point them back to the best their community has to offer and remind them area businesses can meet their needs and offer them good, old-fashioned service," Schappell said.

New deals

Members get notified as new deals are added to the app.

"You also get reminded when you are in areas that have deals, so you remember to use the membership you purchased," Heather said.

Heather said a charity partner can almost expect its income from the app to grow annually since there is a high likelihood members will renew from year to year, in addition to new members joining. The app also helps charities who struggle to get grants.

"A lot of grants need to see that you have some type of recurring revenue in order to apply for the grants," she said.

Each charity is responsible for leveraging its membership, and there is no fee for a charity to become a member. Heather and her husband offer creative direction to their charity partners for ways to do that.

"Ultimately it is up to them to implement what we have brainstormed," Heather said. "My favorite thing is to brainstorm. After that is where the fun begins."

Easy to use

Another great need being met through the Bradys' app is a way for charities to share information with the base that supports them.

"They can communicate their events through it - it's a need charities have," she said. "They can use it as an ad page, and it doesn't cost them anything."

The app is easy for anyone to use as long as you have a smartphone.

"It is very simple but so powerful," Brady said. "It's all about raising awareness and funds for charities."

She hopes that people give second thought to just quickly going online when they want to purchase something.

"The app helps you to consider where can I get this locally," she said. "It is locals helping locals. Any reminder we can do, is always nice to give back. They (the businesses) are the backbone of the community at the end of the day."

The future looks bright for the Do It Local app given their membership base is growing steadily and they are above the national standard for a new app.

"I can't wait to see where it goes and how much we can make an impact doing something so simple and something passion driven," Heather said.

Contact Courtney H. Diener-Stokes: life@readingeagle.com.

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