

Local Business Manifesto

Press Conference

by Rebecca Melançon

The Austin Independent Business Alliance represents more than 800 locally owned businesses. We are the voice of local business in Austin, Texas. Nowhere in our 10 year history has this voice spoken louder or more clearly than in the Local Business Manifesto.

Last year AIBA convened a Leadership Circle of 10 of our business owners to discuss the obstacles and issues facing small, independent businesses, and to try to find some solutions to these obstacles to share with our members. This conversation led to a discussion of what we wanted Austin to look like for independent business. We began to speak in terms of goals and ideals, of a vision for a healthy local economy where independent businesses thrived and local government was an advocate and not an adversary.

But goals are not enough. We wanted to offer the City of Austin solutions as well. Outlined in the Manifesto are three goals and 16 ideas to achieve these goals.

Our overriding goal is to alter the direction of economic development in Austin, to focus more on building the local business community that we all know and love. Austin has spent a lot of time and money courting big business to move here with thousands of jobs and a larger tax base. And we need the Samsungs and the Apples of the world.

But every day, every week, every month, locally owned businesses have created more jobs than all big companies put together. It's time for the city to recognize that independent business is the backbone of our local economy and direct programs and initiatives to assist this economic powerhouse as well.

I'm pleased to say that, as I visited with city council members to introduce the Local Business Manifesto, I was met with open minds and a commitment to our independent businesses. Our city council has embraced the Manifesto and set a course to begin to implement some of the ideas it represents. These are not all quick fixes or easy solutions. It will take time to develop and implement the ideas expressed in the Manifesto but it is well worth the effort.

With the help of our city leaders, we can make Austin a thriving entrepreneurial mecca with independent businesses that express our unique culture, provide jobs for generations to come, and build a sustainable local economy.