

Washington city helps residents, merchants with wooden money

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Image 1. Loren Ackerman holds a piece of wooden money he printed on an 1890s-era press in Tenino, Washington, on May 21, 2020. In an effort to help residents and local merchants alike get through the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, the small town has issued wooden currency for residents to spend at local businesses, decades after it created a similar program during the Great Depression. Photo: Ted S. Warren/AP Photo

Laurie Mahlenbrei was shopping at her local grocery store. She picked out several items. The total price added up to \$24.97.

Mahlenbrei handed the cashier a slice of wood marked \$25. Then, she walked out with her groceries.

The wooden currency only works in the small city of Tenino, Washington. It is a way to help people who have lost work because of the spread of COVID-19. It is also a way to help local merchants.

Tenino used wooden currency once before. The city created a similar program in the 1930s. A worldwide economic crisis happened then. It was called the Great Depression.

The wooden money program has been brought back. The city had some money set aside for emergencies. From that fund, the city is giving residents who need it up to \$300 a month in wooden currency.

Keeping The Money In The Community

The currency is made of maple wood. It is about the size and thickness of a flashcard. It is printed on a printing press from the 1890s. The press once printed the Great Depression currency.

Almost every business in town accepts the wooden currency. That includes gas stations and restaurants. Businesses can exchange it for real dollars at City Hall. Or, they can sell them. Coin collectors across the country have offered to buy the currency. Some collectors have offered three times the currency's value in Tenino.



Tyler Whitworth used to lead the local business organization. He said the city could have given out cash. Then, residents might have spent the money outside of Tenino. Using the local currency is a way to "keep the money in the community," Whitworth said. The program helps local businesses along with people in need.

About 1,800 people live in Tenino. Wayne Fournier is the city's mayor. It was his idea to bring back the program. The city's businesses rely on tourism during the summer, Fournier said. The spread of COVID-19 has affected that.

"Now everything's been shut down," Fournier said. "Our businesses, our restaurants, antique stores, they're not going to have the traffic. There's no assistance available for them. We are on our own."

City Found A Way To Help Its Residents

Mahlenbrei says the wooden currency program has really helped her. She is a school bus driver. She is still making some money. Although, she is making half as much as she usually makes. Mahlenbrei uses hearing aids. They require a monthly payment. The company took them back because she could not pay for them anymore.



"When they came up with this, I was the first person in line down there," said Mahlenbrei. She is 63 years old. "I have no money. This really helps."

Maria Williams owns a local coffee shop. She said she is proud of Tenino for figuring out on its own how to help its residents.

"This is all about what we can do for ourselves," Williams said.

Quiz

1 Which sentence explains when wooden money was first used in Tenino?

- (A) The city created a similar program in the 1930s.
- (B) It is printed on a printing press from the 1890s.
- (C) The press once printed the Great Depression currency.
- (D) The city's businesses rely on tourism during the summer, Fournier said.

2 Read the paragraph below from the section "Keeping The Money In The Community."

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Which question is answered in this paragraph?

- (A) What can businesses do with the wooden currency?
- (B) How many other towns use the wooden currency?
- (C) Who are the coin collectors who want wooden currency?
- (D) Why does City Hall give real dollars to local businesses?

3 WHY did Tyler Whitworth want to use the wooden currency instead of cash?

- (A) to get people to visit Tenino during the tourist season
- (B) to get people to spend the money at local businesses
- (C) to help new restaurants and stores get started
- (D) to get better deals when he is buying groceries

4 According to the section "City Found A Way To Help Its Residents," WHY does Laurie Mahlenbrei say the wooden currency has helped her?

- (A) She is able to use the money at her local grocery store.
- (B) She was able to use it to keep her local coffee shop open.
- (C) She is able to make half of the money she usually makes.
- (D) She was able to use it to buy some new hearing aids.