



Digital Products

- See today's Digital Edition
- Subscribe to email newsletter

Inside Times Colonist

- News
- Sports
- Arts
- Life
- Capital & Van. Isl.
- Monitor
- Comment
- Letters
- Columnists
- 30 day Archive
- Headline Scan
- The Stocks Page
- Newspaper Ads
- Special Sections

Weekly Sections

- Books and Ideas
- Travel
- Driving
- Go!
- Homes

Features

- Victoria's Sewage
- New Homes Special

Classifieds

Marketplace

- Find a job at working.com
- Find a car at driving.ca
- Find an apartment at renting.ca
- Find real estate at Homes
- Find great stuff at shopping
- Find a contractor

Announcements

- Announcements at Celebrating.com
- Obituaries at Remembering

General Classifieds

- Local classifieds
- Selling? Place an ad
- Meet a match at Connecting

Subscriber Exclusives

Headlines marked with a are exclusive to subscribers.

[More](#)

shopping™
Search Newspaper Ads!

Enter our contests

Your Times Colonist

- Subscriber Services
- Subscribe
- Renew subscription
- Update credit card information
- Send us a news tip

Grapevine network boosts spirits, sales

Darron Kloster, Times Colonist
Published: Saturday, June 16, 2007

Steven McNaughton was in need of a lift earlier this month after a slick pair of shoplifters made off with \$400 worth of organic coffee and tea from his small grocery on Oak Bay Avenue.

He was still stewing over the sticky-fingered thieves a few days later when in through his door at Pomodori's Market appears a huge silver — well, make that purple — lining that went a long way to restoring his faith in people.

The Grape Vine, a group of do-gooders who surprise new small businesses using a mix of Welcome Wagon tactics and the Random Acts of Kindness phenomenon, took McNaughton totally by surprise. The group 20 Grapers as they call themselves brought bunches of their trademark purple balloons, words of encouragement, deep networking roots and, of course, plenty of their own money to spend in his market.



View Larger Image

TC / Pomodori's Market owner Steven McNaughton, left, gets a surprise visit from members of the Victoria Grapevine. The group of Good Samaritans regularly shows up at new small businesses to provide encouragement and support. It worked wonders for McNaughton, who had been robbed two days before.

Ray Smith

[Email to a friend](#)

[Printer friendly](#)

Font:

"You know after what I'd just been through, I thought 'holy smokes, this is fantastic,'" said McNaughton, who had worked at Thrifty Foods and the Market on Yates for 15 years before breaking out on his own last year. "I was overwhelmed. I had no idea who they were. It was such good timing, considering what had happened to us. It really showed me there's lots of good people out there."

The timing was purely coincidental. Grapevine organizers had never met McNaughton or had no idea that he'd been pinched. Co-founder Sarala Godine and her conspirators keep their Grapings a closely guarded secret until the last minute, only telling their fellow networkers to meet at a location close by and informing them en route to the store.

Pomodori's was the 26th business to get the royal purple treatment from the Grapevine, which was founded three years ago by Godine, Barbara McDonell, Sandra Tennent and Debbie Yorke. All small-business owners, they grew the concept from a single gathering to help shore up a friend's struggling pet-supply business, and it took off from there. Through their own struggles to establish themselves, Godine said they realized how difficult it was for retail outlets to build a customer base with high overheads and small advertising budgets.

Godine said a boost of encouragement can go a long way for businesses, and the monthly feel-good adventure is a unique networking experience for participants.

The founders target one small business per month that has been open less than a year. To date, they've graped a bookstore, a nursery, five gift stores and art galleries, three furniture stores, four delicatessens, a grocery store, five cafes, two coffee houses, an Earth-friendly cleaner, silversmith, antique and consignment clothing shop and a bedding store.

The Grapevine is taking its summer break during July and August, but will resume in September.

The non-profit group has about 400 members who network via a website, www.wegrape.com. Businesses which are graped get a web page on the site with a link to their own website.

Granola Groovy (now Good Plant Company) downtown was the first business graped, Oct. 30, 2004. The owners say they were "gobsmacked" when 35 people walked in with balloons and spending money to call them "best of the bunch" for the month. "We had never experienced such a huge influx of new customers at once and were totally overwhelmed at the community spirit and generosity," said co-owner Alain St. Onge.

Find a great place to call home

[click here](#)



new **renting.ca**

Find a great place to call home

Today's TC



Victorians celebrate Beacon Hill anniversary
Hundreds of

Victorians celebrated Beacon Hill Park's 125th anniversary Saturday ...

[\[more \]](#)

- New ferries being built with an eye on future
- Aboriginal men struggle to define themselves as dads
- Kids meet classical music at Victoria Music Corner Ensemble debut

More News Stories

National & World News

- Some Anglican gays switching churches, as same-sex vote looms
- Vermont wants UBC profs to testify about smoking claims
- Vitamin D hoopla has researchers debating

More News Updates