Wal-Mart dominates local economy

Students, professors boycott retail giant for multitude of reasons

Mandi Sagez
for the Index

Always low prices. Always. However, some people never shop at Wal-Mart. Never.

Wal-Mart is the sixth-largest employer in Kirksville with 350 employees. Alisa Kigar, executive director for the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce, said Wal-Mart is financially good for the community.

Despite this benefit, some students and faculty of Truman boycott Wal-Mart. The boycotting individuals said they choose not to shop there for several reasons, with employee treatment and community impact as two main criteria.

Starting in January 2002, Linda Seidel, professor of English, began her 11-month Wal-Mart boycott. She said she used to be a regular customer, even as she watched other businesses such as Pamida, Kmart and Easter Foods disappear from Kirksville.

Seidel said she became more knowledgeable about Wal-Mart and all the reasons not to shop there. She said some people argue that Wal-Mart provides low prices for the "rural poor."

"That's undoubtedly true, but of course, why are the rural poor so poor?" she said. "Well, when people leave the farm and come into town to try to get jobs to supplement their farm income, the fact that Wal-Mart is one of the big employers helps keep their wages low, which helps keep [the rural poor] poor."

Seidel said another reason she boycotts Wal-Mart is because the corporation is against unions.

"They try to do everything they can to keep unions out of their stores," she said. "I don't think any of the stores in the United States are unionized, but some of them are in Canada, and [Wal-Mart] managed to close one. Wal-Mart can't tolerate unions."

Sophomore Phil Wire is a union member at a grocery store in St. Louis. He said he boycotts Wal-Mart and will continue boycotting because of its antiunion practices.

"The union is really against Wal-Mart, obviously against Wal-Mart's policies," Wire said. "So that's rubbed off some because I've worked [for a union] for three and a half years now."

> "Sometimes Wal-Mart's the lowest price, and other times it's not."
>
> **Justin Seiwell**
> Sophomore

Wire said he purchases his necessities from other retailers. He said Hy-Vee has pretty much everything he needs. For hardware supplies, he goes to a hardware store like Ace, and for auto parts he shops at O'Reilly Auto Parts.

Wire said he even gets his school supplies at Hy-Vee.

"I found that the price difference isn't as great as most people think, and I'm somewhat of a cheapskate," he said. "Sometimes I don't like [shopping elsewhere] very much, but it's a matter of principle, so I stick with it."

Wire said it has been easier to boycott Wal-Mart than he thought.

"Now that I'm [in Kirksville], I thought I would have more difficulty than I actually do," he said.

Wire said that anything not available in Kirksville, he can buy over the Internet.

"You can even buy toilet paper off Amazon.com," he said.

Wire said that when a person buys something from a store, he or she is supporting that store's business practices.

"I don't really like Wal-Mart's business [motto]," he said. "Try and shave off every single dollar even if it has a negative effect on employees and communities."

Sophomore Justin Seiwell said he also does not appreciate Wal-Mart's treatment of its workers.

"[My boycotting] originally started about four and a half to five years ago when I started getting jobs," Seiwell said. "I really didn't care for the way [Wal-Mart] treats some of their employees."

To boycott Wal-Mart, Seiwell said he does most of his food shopping entirely at Hy-Vee. For other items, he tries to find smaller stores, like on the Square. He said he purchases greeting cards from the Hallmark store and his office supplies from the Golden Ruler.

Seiwell also said he orders items off the Internet. Although he makes an effort to boycott Wal-Mart, he said there are some situations where he has to break his boycott.

"Unfortunately, as I knew when I decided to go to school in a small town, if you really need something and you really need it fast, Wal-Mart is pretty reliable," he said.

He said breaking the boycott is strictly for necessity items. Seiwell said he once drove to Columbia, Mo., to purchase a CD. The CD was not available at Hastings, so he and a friend drove to Columbia to purchase it, even though they were pretty sure it was also at the local Wal-Mart.

"People can argue with me about, 'You're spending more money on gas,' but that's also a way for us to escape Kirksville for a while," he said.

Seiwell agreed the price differences are not as extreme as some people might think. He said anyone on a budget should know that if a person comparison-shops, he or she can find cheaper deals than Wal-Mart.

"Sometimes Wal-Mart's the lowest price, and other times it's not," Seiwell said. "So if you're really on a budget, [consumers should] comparison-shop between [Wal-Mart] and Hy-Vee and some of the other local stores here."

He said he has nothing against the individual store or even the people who work there, but he just opposes the corporation.

Julio Vega, assistant manager for the Kirksville Wal-Mart, said Wal-Mart believes in its employees having an equal opportunity to represent themselves, so unions are not necessary.

He said Wal-Mart offers quality for a good price.

"As far as pricing the merchandise, we try to get suppliers to give us quality, but at the same time we always look for the best price, to offer the customers the best price," Vega said.

As for boycotters' concerns for Wal-Mart's wages, Vega said that at Wal-Mart, some people work for a long time.

"Why? Because they're happy," he said.

Doug Nichting, manager for the Kirksville Wal-Mart, declined to comment on the issues raised by the boycotting individuals.

Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index

Superstore spurs changes in local business tactics

Wal-Mart's low prices are helpful to students but remain a threat to local small businesses

Sara DeGonia
Assistant Features Editor

Wal-Mart is like the weather.

On sunny days, it is a one-stop shop that draws citizens from several counties to spend their money in Kirksville. On stormy days, it looms over local business owners, threatening their commercial existence.

"Wal-Mart is a very interesting phenomenon in this country," said Phil Tate, director of job creation for Kirksville Regional Economic Development Inc.

Tate said Wal-Mart affects businesses in every city in which it resides, but the big question is whether its positive or negative aspects have a stronger impact.

"I don't think it's a simple answer as, is Wal-Mart a good thing or a bad thing," he said. "I don't think there's a clear-cut answer about it."

Tate said it is undeniable that local businesses could and probably will suffer as a result of a new Wal-Mart in any community.

"I have seen the impact of Wal-Mart in many, many different ways," he said. "Now, it is true ... particularly in smaller communities ... that when Wal-Mart comes to town with a retail facility, you can about rest assured that there will be some small businesses that will not continue to exist."

> "I have seen the impact of Wal-Mart in many, many different ways."
>
> **Phil Tate**
> Director of Job Creation for Kirksville Regional Economic Development Inc.

Because of Wal-Mart's wide selection, Tate said, a variety of small businesses can be destroyed.

"You will lose some small businesses," he said. "Could be a pharmacy, could be a hardware [store], could be a clothing [store], could even be an automotive supply. Now, that's a negative thing if you put some of those small people out of business."

Small business cannot continue operating with traditional methods when a Wal-Mart arrives, Tate said.

"If a hardware store of a third generation in a community tries to compete with Wal-Mart doing business the same way they've done business for the last three generations, it won't work," he said.

Alisa Kigar, executive director of the Kirksville Area Chamber of Commerce, said she thinks it is virtually impossible for small businesses to contend with Wal-Mart.

"There are very few small mom-and-pop businesses that are trying to compete with Wal-Mart," Kigar said. "... They're smart enough to know that it's really tough to compete with Wal-Mart, and so they find a niche market in some other capacity. ... You just can't make a living in a town of this size and compete with Wal-Mart."

Herb Sieren, owner of the Kirksville clothing store Sieren's Palace, said he adapted his sales methods when Wal-Mart moved its location about 15 years ago.

"We've had to move up in quality," Sieren said. "We can't compete, say, with Wrangler jeans. I would never have a Wrangler because [Wal-Mart has] Wrangler, and they could beat me at the price. So we moved to a better jean, a more premium product at a better price."

He said he specialized his merchandise to differentiate from Wal-Mart. "We've created a niche above Wal-Mart in quality," Sieren said. "Our business is good."

Bryan Collier, co-owner of Gardner-Collier Jewelry, said few of his products directly compete with Wal-Mart, but the mass retailer has impacted him and other businesses nonetheless, especially when Wal-Mart first moved to Kirksville.

"I think the entire downtown was affected because the number of businesses in the downtown area certainly decreased, maybe not immediately, but over some time," Collier said. "We used to have neighborhood grocery stores. Now we have two big grocery stores."

Officials from Hy-Vee declined to comment. Representatives from several other businesses, including Beard's Decorating Center, King Appliance and Furniture and Troester's Clothing and Top Shop also declined to comment.

Tate said he thinks local businesses might not want to comment because of their dual-sided attitude toward Wal-Mart.

"They probably do compete with Wal-Mart, but they also see Wal-Mart and their impact on the region as a positive thing," he said. "They probably don't want to say anything negative or positive."

Kigar said she thinks it was a mistake for businesses to decline comment.

"I think it would be a great opportunity to share the positive impact their business has on the community," she said.

Sieren and Collier commented on both the positive and negative aspects of Wal-Mart.

"It's definitely an asset to the community and probably also a detriment to the community," Collier said.

Sieren said he has a love-hate relationship with Wal-Mart, but its presence makes Kirksville a stronger shopping area.

"I'm happy they're here and not 30 miles away because they would pull people from here to wherever they are," Sieren said. "They're going to be around forever, ... so we live with them."

Chris Waller/ Index
Sieren's Palace is one of the businesses that Wal-Mart affects.

Kigar said Wal-Mart is a double-edged sword for the Chamber of Commerce, but because it is the only Wal-Mart in about a nine-county area, it can benefit the city economically when residents of neighboring towns visit for a doctor's appointment and stop by Wal-Mart to stock up.

"To me that is new money coming into the community," she said. "... Kirksville and Adair County is behooved by having Wal-Mart in our community because of the outside traffic that it brings into our town."

It also attracts other businesses to Kirksville, Tate said.

"Other companies ... who survive on volume want to be close to Wal-Mart because that's where your numbers are," he said. "That's the reason that Ruby Tuesday's has chosen a site on the northern end on Highway 63 [and] the reason a new bank is going in."

Tate said the recent addition of Home Depot might not be that different from Wal-Mart's effect on Kirksville.

"It'll be interesting to see what kind of an impact that may have on local family-owned lumber yards and home supply businesses," he said.

A Wal-Mart Empire

- ★ Wal-Mart opened 242 new Supercenters in 2004.
- ★ On average, a Wal-Mart store gets 84 percent of its business from the existing stores in the area.
- ★ Wal-Mart stores in the United States average more than $1 million in sales per week,
- ★ Wal-Mart plans to open 1,000 new Supercenters in the U.S. in the next five years.
- ★ Studies by Retail forward estimate that the new Supercenters will double Wal-Mart's grocery and related revenues.
- ★ If its growth goals are met, Wal-Mart will control more than 35 percent of U.S. food sales and 25 percent of drugstore sales
- ★ Retail Forward also predicted that for every new Supercenter that Wal-Mart opens, two local supermarkets will close.

Source: Walmartwatch.com
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index

Corporation aids charitable causes

Wal-Mart employees emphasize philanthropy, literacy and education in the Kirksville community through donations and volunteerism

Michelle Fortner
for the Index

Besides offering a place to shop, Wal-Mart is there for the community in other ways.

Wal-Mart and its employees are involved in the community through both time and monetary donations.

Missouri Wal-Marts donated more than $8 million to charities and other organizations in 2004, according to the Wal-Mart Web site.

Since the start of the fiscal year in February, the Kirksville Wal-Mart has donated more than $50,000, said Thomas Pearse, general merchandise co-manager at the Kirksville Wal-Mart.

One of the major philanthropy programs for Wal-Mart is the United Way. Wal-Mart stores around the country participate in a matching donation program.

For each dollar that employees donate to the United Way, Wal-Mart will match it.

Nancy Pennington, executive director of the United Way of Adair County, said it is important for corporations such as Wal-Mart to be involved in programs like the United Way.

> "It is a way for the corporate systems to give back to the community that they are in."
>
> **Diane Burger**
> Children's Librarian

"The community supports them by going to them as customers," Pennington said. "This in turn goes back to help the community."

Information for this year's United Way drive is not compiled yet, but Pennington said the Kirksville Wal-Mart employees donated more than $2,800.

With the matching program, Pennington said, the total donation was around $5,600.

Along with the matching gift program, Wal-Mart allows United Way to set up tables outside the store to collect donations.

"We really appreciate them letting us come in and do that," Pennington said.

The donations collected through the United Way of Adair County go to 13 different groups around the county, including the Central Missouri Food Bank, the Adair County Family YMCA, Hospice of Northeast Missouri and Victim Support Services, Pennington said. These groups help members of the county and other surrounding areas.

Pearse said the United Way is one of the main groups supported by Wal-Mart. But he also said many other organizations receive help from Wal-Mart, as well.

Outside the customer service desk, a bulletin board displays cards showing some of the organizations, charities and schools that have received donations from the local Wal-Mart.

Donations range from $250 to $1,500. Groups that have received donations include the American Cancer So-ciety, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Kirksville Crisis Center.

Wal-Mart gave money to many educational groups also, such as the Kirksville High School After Prom, the Kirksville Junior High math department, Schuyler R-I schools and to the Schuyler County High School teacher of the year program.

He said some organizations receive money through matching grant programs. Pearse said other groups run fundraising events at Wal-Mart, such as setting up tables outside the store to collect donations.

Pearse said that after Hurricane Katrina, the store collected for the American Red Cross, donating to the national chapter through the entire Wal-Mart company.

Along with collecting donations, Wal-Mart employees offer their time to help. Pearse said that this past year, employees helped out with Habitat for Humanity.

Wal-Mart has another matching donation program. Through program, called Volunteerism Always Pays, Wal-Mart donates to charitable organizations based on the amount of time employees volunteer there.

Pearse said that this year local employees worked enough to qualify for this program.

"So many of our associates went in and spent three or four hours," Pearse said. "We hit the limit we needed to meet."

Another local organization to which Wal-Mart contributes is the Adair County Public Library.

Diane Burger, children's librarian, said Wal-Mart donated money to the children's section through a literacy grant. This grant, along with donations from others in the community, helped in purchasing LeapPads, interactive educational books, for children to use.

This summer, Wal-Mart donated money to the Dare to Dream book campaign, Burger said. Members of the community donated books, and Wal-Mart gave a monetary donation to help purchase additional books.

Burger said most of the money they get from Wal-Mart comes from grants, which require an organization to complete applications before the money can be distributed.

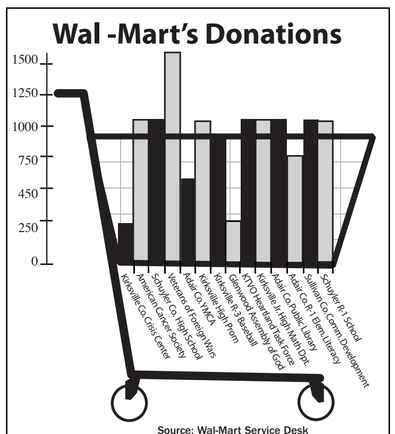
"You have to do the work for it, but it's worth it," Burger said.

Burger said she thinks it is important for businesses in the community, such as Wal-Mart, to help with programs such as the library.

"It builds a relationship with the town," Burger said. "It is a way for the corporate systems to give back to the community that they are in."

Courtney Robbins/ Index
Wal-Mart Supercenter has played a considerable role in the Kirksville community since the store was built on North Baltimore 15 years ago.

Wal -Mart's Donations



Source: Wal-Mart Service Desk
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index

Suit alleges discrimination

David Hatfield
for the Index

A sexual discrimination lawsuit brought against Wal-Mart is now the largest private civil rights class-action lawsuit in U.S. history, representing more than 1.5 million women.

It began in June 2001 when six women filed suit against Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., alleging Wal-Mart discriminated against its female employees, according to the Web site www.walmartclass.com. They claimed Wal-Mart did not grant women equality with men in terms of wages and overlooked them for promotions to management, according to the site.

> "A woman might be a manager, but it's of fabrics and crafts and domestics."
>
> **Alyssa Warrick**
> Senior

In June 2004, U.S. District Judge Martin Jenkins ruled that the case met the requirements to be a class-action lawsuit. A class-action suit is one that is brought by individuals on behalf of a larger group of people who share the same claim.

Seven firms, including three non profit organizations, are representing the women involved in the lawsuit. More than 100 women from 30 different states have submitted declarations of experiencing sexual discrimination while working at Wal-Mart, according to www.walmartclass.com. Female Wal-Mart employees in Missouri have made 10 different declarations.

The plaintiffs seek to reform the alleged discriminatory practices of Wal-Mart and recover lost wages and benefits of victims of discrimination.

The case against Wal-Mart represents all women who have worked for Wal-Mart since December 1998 or who are currently working for Wal-Mart, according to Wal-Mart's Web site. Wal-Mart's public relations office in Bentonville, Ark., declined comment and directed questions to their Web site, www.walmartfacts.com.

Company representatives think certifying the case as a class action is improper because the claims of the original six independent women do not represent the experience of all women employed by Wal-Mart's more than 3,000 stores, according to the Web site. In August, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals heard Wal-Mart's request to drop the class-action certification. A ruling on the appeal is pending.

About 40 percent of managers nationwide are women, and the number of women in managerial positions has been increasing for years. The site also states Wal-Mart does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.

Managers at Kirksville's Wal-Mart declined to comment.

Senior Alyssa Warrick worked at Wal-Mart in Springfield, Mo., for one year in high school.

"It was kind of like [the film] Office Space," she said. "I had five bosses. The hierarchy made it stressful."

Warrick said while she worked at Wal-Mart, the store employed only two female assistant managers.

"Something you can see in general at Wal-Mart is that most of the upper-level managers are men," she said. "A woman might be a manager, but it's of fabrics and crafts or domestics."

Warrick said she hopes this lawsuit will open the door to different kinds of discrimination.

The lawyers working on the case allege that Wal-Mart systematically overlooks women for promotions, according to the group's Web site.

"It might not be specifically coded in the Wal-Mart managers' handbook that only men can be managers, but it's something that is practiced," Warrick said.

The company also is involved in other litigation besides the gender discrimination lawsuit, including wage and hour litigation, a Department of Labor review and a civil case concerning the fair enforcement of immigration laws, according to the group's Web site.

Warrick said she hopes the case brings attention not just to Wal-Mart, but also to other large companies in general.

"I would just encourage people to look behind the smiley face of Wal-Mart and find the dark things behind it," Warrick said.

Senior Tiffany Anderson said she has been employed by Wal-Mart in Kirksville and Macon, Mo., for three years. She said she has never heard complaints from women about discrimination but did say working at Wal-Mart is not always enjoyable.

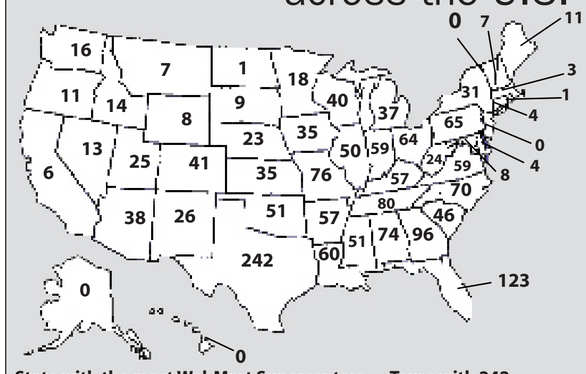
"They're not friendly," Anderson said. "They kind of treat you like you're stupid, but it's not necessarily a female thing."

Anderson said she thinks women are discriminated against in any workplace but never experienced discrimination herself.

The Web site, www.walmartclass.com, offers case developments, attorney information, contact information and a sign-up for women who are members of the class represented in the case.

The site states it is unlawful for an employer to retaliate against an employee for involvement in the case, and if this occurs to get in contact with them through the Web site.

Supercenters across the U.S.



State with the most Wal-Mart Supercenters — Texas with 242
States with the least — Alaska, Hawaii, Vermont and New Jersey with 0

Source: www.walmartfacts.com
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index

Wal-Mart Wages by Gender

Women receive on average fewer opportunities for job placement in higher levels. This chart describes how payment to men and women differs.

Job	Total % Women	Average Earnings $ Men	Women
Regional VP	10.3	$419,435	$269,772
District Mgr.	9.8	$239,519	$177,149
Manager	14.3	$105,682	$89,280
Co - Mgr.	23.0	$59,535	$56,317
Asst. Mgr.	35.7	$39,790	$37,322

Source: walmartclass.com/all=charts.html
Designed by Karen Schwartztrauber/Index