



## New Asheville digital loyalty rewards program offers bounty of benefits

By [Carol Motsinger](#) On November 6, 2013

Clark Harris can trace his love of local back to the first place he was a local.

As a child in Eastern North Carolina, he remembers fondly driving around with his father as he worked, and stopping at the diners and mom and pop joints for lunch. Now, when this tech-guru and business founder drives to Nashville or Atlanta for work from his new hometown of Asheville, he stops at local spots for lunch along the way.

“I have my local spots,” he said about opting for off-the-beaten-path independent restaurants over off-the-exit fast food. “There is a certain pleasure I take in finding these gems. I love seeing that uniqueness.”

Harris’ newest adventure, LoLo, a local loyalty rewards program, encourages others to pursue the same buy-local commitments. And it allows Harris to “the ability to truly embrace (buy local),” he said.

“I truly embrace these artists and I want to fight that fight for them,” he said. Small business owners, artists, craftspeople and chefs providing personal one-of-kind professional “are a huge part of a humanity.”

The program — which is an innovative twist on mileage programs and such discount services as Groupon — will launch Nov. 11. It’s simple to use (I am part of the test group; you can join at [JoinLolo.com](#)) and simple in concept.

LoLo essentially turns any account-connected credit or debit card into a rewards card, by tracking spending when those cards are used with participating businesses. You spend money, and you earn money, that can be used anywhere in the network. Membership is free and members earn 5 percent in rewards on every dollar spent.

When you are ready to cash in some bucks at say a restaurant, you present your account on your phone to a server and it will sort of like a gift certificate.

Unlike Groupon, for instance, businesses don’t have to take a hit from discounts. And unlike mileage credit card programs, for another instance, the rewards you reap don’t go outside of the local business network.

“LoLo is different from other rewards programs we’ve seen; it enables us to reward loyal customers without completely sacrificing our profit margins through discounts or coupons,” said Tanya Triber, co-owner The Junction in the River Arts District. “LoLo itself is a locally-born business — the folks behind it are literally friends and neighbors. Participating in LoLo is completely in line with The Junction’s business mantra of supporting and sourcing locally whenever we can.”

In addition to The Junction, LoLo network businesses include Barley's, Bandidos, Corner Kitchen, Chestnut, Cucina 24, Grey Eagle, Pure Pilates, The Junction, The Southern, Westville Pub and Youngblood Bicycles. The company plans on adding more businesses soon.

And what does Harris mean by local? He has an appropriately strict definition, which I appreciate the more and more "local" is diluted by manipulating marketing campaigns.

"We want to work with uniquely Asheville businesses," he said, meaning the establishment is more than 50 percent locally owned and there can't be another location in another city.

They are also wanting to give back to communities in another way: LoLo, which has five employees, is also partnering with local nonprofits. Every time someone joins LoLo, the company donates a dollar to a selected nonprofit.

The nonprofit right now is Asheville on Bikes advances bicycle advocacy and infrastructure in Asheville, NC. A safe and connected bicyclist and pedestrian system supports access to local businesses.

And this is only the beginning: Harris plans on taking this model to cities across the Southeast and creating an even larger network of locals supporting locals.

In the world of LoLo, you can be a local anywhere.

Want to learn more or sign up? <http://www.joinlolo.com>

Link to article: <http://blogs2.citizen-times.com/carol/2013/11/06/new-asheville-digital-loyalty-rewards-program-offers-bounty-of-benefits/>