



Bartering is Back

Cape Cod's new Ruby Kestrel Bartering Exchange

by Joan Harvey and Caryn Ritchie

Bartering has been going on since the beginning of time. In essence, it's the exchange of goods or services for little or no cash, allowing you to get what you need by giving what you have.

In a recession such as the one we're currently experiencing, bartering goods and services becomes a necessity.

We started the Ruby Kestrel Bartering Exchange in January 2011. The idea developed out of needs presented by clients in Caryn's psychotherapy practice.

Many of the clients had come to Cape Cod to retire, and were experiencing difficulties transitioning into their new lives. These skilled individuals soon found they had little to do that made them feel useful and valuable. They also were having trouble finding someone they could trust to help with their homes or yards.

Caryn saw other clients who were unemployed and underemployed, amounting to a lot of people with skills and time, but little money. The idea of matching people with needs to others with skills became the impetus for this new business.

At Ruby Kestrel, we manage the transactions between members. If you have a skill, service, or knowledge to trade, we will find the members who need what you have. In exchange, you can draw on other members for the things you need.

HOW DO YOU BECOME A MEMBER?

Becoming a member is as simple as going to our website and clicking on "Becoming a Member." There is an online application to fill out which we will review before contacting you. No fee is required until you are accepted as a member.

Unlike some online bartering sites, this business is locally-based here on Cape Cod, run by and for Cape Cod residents. All members are screened before being invited to join, and feedback will be available on all our members.

Bartering on Cape Cod has additional value because it promotes the Go Local/Go Green movement and it reduces our carbon footprint. Harnessing the collective talents and skills of Cape residents increases the strength and cohesiveness of the community and enhances individual self worth.



Ruby Kestrel's Caryn Ritchie Gardening
Photograph courtesy of Joan Harvey

WHAT DOES IT COST TO PARTICIPATE?

There is an annual membership fee of \$100 to join, for which you immediately receive 100 exchange units, so that, in effect, the fee is cancelled out. The exchange unit is the bartering currency and is equal to one dollar. The administrators manage each member's online bank, keeping track of exchange units deposited and exchange units used.

The member decides what he or she wants to barter, the value, and how to set it up. Administrators can help with setting fees and writing the description of your particular skill or service. Every member is also posted on Facebook as an additional form of advertising.

Membership includes website access, database of member goods and services, weekly emails with updated information, maintenance of individual accounts, and matching of members for goods and services exchange.

There is also a 10% fee charged to the member who uses a service. For example, if a member wants to use 100 exchange units for auto repair, they first pay Ruby Kestrel \$10. Then 100 exchange units are debited from their online bank and deposited into the auto repair member's online bank.

We find that this method works well for small businesses. Once customers meet them initially through a barter, they are more likely to return directly as repeat customers. We encourage this as a positive way for small businesses to grow.



DIVERSITY OF MEMBERSHIP

The Bartering Exchange is necessary when one person wants a service that another has, but that person doesn't want the corresponding service. Ruby Kestrel gives you the skills of the whole membership to choose from, something a one-to-one barter cannot offer.

Our members currently include an electrician, pet groomer, florist, auto repair shop, landscaping company, business attorney, therapeutic yoga instructor, healing arts therapist, fly-fishing trip, fly-tying lessons, art lessons, pet sitting, apartment rental on Bass River, paddle boarding, memberships to the Cultural Center of Cape Cod and passes to Zooquarium.

We are constantly looking to build our membership, and ask our members to suggest services to look for. Many people believe they don't have anything to barter. We help you realize what skills you have. Drivers, house cleaners, and dog walkers are services that are often requested and are common skills many people have but never think about.

Caryn Ritchie lives in South Yarmouth. She is a Psychotherapist, PHD RNCS, with a private practice South Yarmouth. She also writes the "Free Thoughts" column for Gateway publications.

Joan Harvey lives in South Yarmouth. She is a self-employed graphic designer, technical illustrator, web designer and artist.

Together, Caryn and Joan run Ruby Kestrel Bartering Exchange in South Yarmouth. For more information, visit their website at www.rubykestrelbarteringexchange.com.