Think Local First Society

President's Report – 2025/2026 AGM

September 23, 2026

Dear Members, Community Partners and Friends of Think Local First,

When I became President of Think Local First last September, my word for the year was momentum.

I inherited an organization that had come through some challenging years with a stronger foundation in place. Under Past President Mary Lou Newbold, financial reporting had been brought up to date, membership had grown, and greater attention was being given to governance and organizational planning.

My focus was to build on that momentum and become much more intentional about what TLF could become, how we operate and where we can have the greatest impact.

Strengthening the Organization

A significant amount of work this year happened behind the scenes.

Our Board and management team undertook strategic planning focused on the fundamentals of Think Local First: governance, organizational roles, membership, financial sustainability, communications and events

That work helped us clarify who we are:

Core Focus:

- **To provide a platform to champion local businesses and community organizations.**

Core Values:

- **Relationship-Focused Community**
  Building authentic relationships between local business owners, local organizations and community partners.
- **Purpose-Driven Champion**
  Advocating for the importance and economic impact of supporting locally owned businesses.
- **Integrity-Based Collaboration**
  Operating with honesty, transparency and collaboration that benefits the local ecosystem.

Following the membership changes approved at last year's AGM, we began putting the new structure into practice, broadening participation to better reflect the local ecosystem we serve, including locally operated charities and non-profit organizations, while maintaining the distinction and benefits of locally owned and operated voting members.

We continued strengthening how the organization operates, with clearer responsibilities, better planning processes and more repeatable systems - spending less time reinventing the wheel and more time creating value for our members.

Financial sustainability also became a more deliberate part of our planning. Membership fees were reviewed, and we continued developing opportunities through partnerships, sponsorships, campaigns and initiatives, including a new Digital Sponsor category to support our growing digital presence and member visibility.

Much of this work happens behind the scenes, but it matters. Strong organizations need strong foundations.

Building the Platform for Local

One of our largest undertakings this year was the strategic redevelopment of the Think Local First website.

From agreement to launch, the new website was developed and soft launched in less than three months.

But this was never simply about building a better-looking website.

Our vision is for Think Local First to increasingly become the platform for local - a place to discover local businesses and organizations, understand why choosing local matters, and find ways to participate in our local community.

Our member directory is an important part of that vision, but the platform extends well beyond the website.

Over the past year, we have expanded in the ways our members can connect, participate, contribute and be visible. Some of the initiatives we introduced or continued to develop include:

- **Book Club in the Pub**
  Exploring ideas, learning together and creating conversations beyond traditional networking.
- **Love Local Week**
  Building a recognizable, repeatable celebration of local.
- **President's Breakfasts and member gatherings**
  Creating more personal opportunities for authentic connection.
- **Seat at the Table**
  Being deliberate about where TLF participates and where the local-first perspective should be represented.
- **Developing thought leaders from within our membership**
  Creating opportunities for members to share their expertise and contribute to community conversations.
- **Repeatable signature events and initiatives**
  Moving away from continually reinventing activities and toward programs we can refine, grow and make recognizable year after year.
- **Local Strong. Canada Strong.**
  Creating a simple, positive, and visible way for businesses, organizations, and individuals, whether TLF members or not, to show their support for local.

Different initiatives, but one common purpose: **TLF provides the platform** to connect people, amplify our members, develop local voices and keep local visible.

Showing Up in Our Community

Relationships remain at the heart of Think Local First.

Throughout the year, we continued strengthening relationships with our media partners, business organizations and community partners across Greater Victoria.

We also began using our voice more deliberately.

During the year, we submitted two letters to the editor, including one published in the Times Colonist - part of our effort to establish TLF as a credible voice in conversations about local business, community and strong local economies.

Think Local First has been pioneering the local-first movement since 2012. That history gives us perspective - but history alone does not make us relevant.

Our opportunity now is to build on that history and establish TLF as a trusted voice on why local matters.

This week, the federal government introduced Bill C-39, the proposed Building Canada Strong Act, part of a broader national conversation about strengthening Canada's economy, infrastructure, trade and supply chains.

Whatever ultimately comes from that legislation, the conversation reinforces something TLF has been saying since 2012: strong communities and a strong country are built from the ground up.

That means we need to show up, be visible and keep the message of local alive. Locally owned businesses and strong local communities need to remain part of the conversation about building a stronger economy.

We also have extraordinary knowledge within our membership. Part of our role is to provide the platform for members and community partners to bring their expertise and voices into those conversations.

Looking Ahead — Intention

If momentum described my first year as President, intention will guide my second.

We have spent this year strengthening the structure of Think Local First. Now our focus turns to using that structure to grow our impact.

Our priorities for the coming year include:

- continuing to grow and strengthen our membership;
- building a financially stable and sustainable operating model;
- developing recognizable, repeatable signature events, campaigns and initiatives;
- increasing the value and visibility of our member directory and digital platform;
- strengthening strategic partnerships and our community presence;
- continuing to establish Think Local First as a trusted source and thought leader on why local matters; and
- becoming more deliberate about measuring what we do — not simply asking whether we did something, but whether it increased engagement, membership, visibility, revenue or impact.

These are ambitious goals.

But I believe Think Local First should be ambitious.

We are thinking local, but always within the context of the bigger picture.

Building It Together

None of what we accomplished this year happened because of one person.

I am incredibly grateful to our Board of Directors. We are a working Board, and every director brings different experience, perspective and connections to the table. Collectively, that has helped shape where Think Local First is going.

I also want to recognize a few Board members who stepped into particular leadership roles this year.

Kerry Brown led us through our strategic planning process, challenging our thinking and helping us become much clearer about our focus and values. That work provided an important foundation for where we go next.

Carlene Thompson has brought tremendous governance knowledge and experience to our Board and repeatedly stepped forward when we needed someone to take on a role. Carlene is one of those people who simply says yes when TLF needs her.

Steven Seltzer has been an extraordinary support to me and TLF, bringing perspective, challenging our thinking and consistently stepping in when there is work to be done. I am very grateful for his leadership and support.

These are just a few examples of what it means to be a working Board. Every director contributes differently, and the strength of TLF comes from people willing to contribute their experience, ideas, relationships and time. It has been a genuine pleasure to serve alongside a Board that is so engaged and invested in the work of TLF.

Jasmine Philip, our Managing Director, has an extraordinary understanding of TLF, our members and how all the pieces fit together. She keeps us moving while always being willing to question how we do things and find a better way.

Kathryn Pascuzzo of Swank Creative, our Development & Marketing Coordinator, brings fresh creative energy and a strong marketing lens to TLF. She has helped sharpen our brand, rethink how we tell our story and turn ideas into something people can engage with.

Our recent Book Club in the Pub, discussing Daniel Coyle's The Culture Code, confirmed something for me:

We are the kindergartners.

We throw ideas on the table, question them and build on them. There is trust, curiosity, laughter and very little ego - and the idea usually gets better.

Mary Lou Newbold, our Past President, has given me both her friendship and wisdom. I have valued having her experience and perspective to draw on throughout my first year as President.

More than two years ago, **Pedro Marquez** led our Board through a governance session that opened my eyes to concepts that stayed with me and helped shape where I believed we needed to focus this year. Pedro, that session made a difference.

Thank you as well to our media partners, sponsors, event hosts, and community partners who continue to support and amplify Think Local First.

And, most importantly, thank you to our members.

You are the reason this organization exists.

This year we strengthened our foundation, built new platforms, created new opportunities for connection and became clearer about who we are and where we are going.

Now we build on it. Together.

Momentum got us moving. Intention will determine where we go.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly Carter
President
Think Local First Association