

Count on Me 'Cause I Can Count on You



Truly Local Banking and Totally Awesome Results

Niagara is a vibrant and diverse region. We are filled with fruit trees, fresh markets, and fun festivals that support and celebrate our awesomeness. The [Niagara Food Festival](#), the [Niagara Folk Arts Festival](#), the [In the Soil Festival](#), I could go on and on! We are filled with a million bazillion wonders! Sure, that's pretty good, but I believe there is always room for growth. Sky's the limit, right?

I'm a lucky guy because I get to support Niagara's growth every day in my work at PenFinancial. Did you know that all of our funds are reinvested back in our members and in our communities? That means that when you invest with us, you are also helping your friends and neighbours achieve their dreams. That is truly local banking. Your investments help us help local businesses grow. Their deposits help you get the loan that fits your needs. There are so many ways that we work together.

So, like Bruno Mars said, "you can count on me, like 1, 2, 3...I can count on you like, 4, 3, 2." We can count on each other to build up Niagara and reach for the sky.

Front Row to Awesome

How else do we help our friends and neighbours? I'm glad you asked! We reinvest in our members, and we also build and give back to our communities through various initiatives. Take our [Skates for Kids](#) program, for example. We started this program back in 2009 to provide skates and helmets to local schools. One of our members, Front Row Sports, jumped on board to help us right away, and Dave and Armando have remained super supportive – they've sharpened thousands of skates free of charge, and ordered helmets at cost for our partner schools. Why? Because they are awesome. Oh, and because with their continued partnership, we've been able to provide 15 Niagara area schools with gently used skates and helmets and, as a result, those schools have been able to implement school-wide skating programs. Where do all of those skates come from? You! Niagara residents. PenFinancial members. We are all working together to support each other – to create a healthier, and more vibrant Niagara.

So, you want to be like Dave and Armando? You want to support our communities, but are wondering: "Akshat, where do I start?" I have a few simple ideas. Think local. Shop local. Eat local. Play local. Bank local. By shopping, eating, and banking locally, you invest in yourself and the growth of our great region. It really is that simple. By supporting each other, we invest in our success and, like I said before, sky's the limit!

To help guide you further, may I present (in no particular order, as they are all equally awesome):

Akshat's Totally Awesome Top 10 Picks for Niagara

1. Front Row Sports

<http://frontrowsport.com/>

The Thorold business I mentioned above is run with a heart and an awesome selection of sporting goods. You'll find great deals on hockey equipment, figure skating supplies, bikes, and other sporting items – and they also pair with local professionals to offer training programs you can trust to up your game. When you go in, be sure to tell Dave and Armando, Akshat sent you!

2. Welland Farmer's Market

<https://www.welland.ca/Market/index.asp>

The BEST fresh market this side of Highway 20. Niagara has so much great produce, not to mention local meats and cheeses, and this market offers an amazing selection of all of this and more. Come out and meet your local farmers and sink your teeth into something delicious every Saturday from 6am (for you early birds) to 12pm (for you night owls) – all year long.

This market runs all year because its always a good time to support local vendors!

3. Niagara Furniture Bank

<http://www.furniturebank.org/programs-services/furniture-donation/>

This St. Catharines charity offers pick-up and delivery of gently-used furnishings. Leaving Brock and don't want to take your shelving with you? No problem, they'll come and get it! Renovating your basement and upgrading your television and couch, call them to haul out your old stuff. It won't go to waste! The Furniture Bank pairs with local agencies to provide the formerly homeless, refugees or immigrants, or others in need, with the items they need most to set up their homes. Upcycling with a heart to help others in your community – so awesome!

4. Marshville Chocolates

<http://www.marshvillechocolates.ca/>

A Wainfleet staple since the 1970s. I dare you to walk by and not be sucked in by the sweet smells and delicious confections at this family-run business. Whether its for a graduation gift, a sweetheart, or a special occasion, you can find a sweet treat to suit your needs (and your cravings) here.

5. Garden City Food Co-op

<http://www.gardencityfoodcoop.ca/>

Want a grocery experience that supports local farmers and Niagara communities, but can't always make it the market? Well, look no further -- The Garden City Food Co-op is currently accepting memberships to its flagship store in downtown St. Catharines. Run by its members, when you shop here, [you'll feed yourself, your family, and the local economy](#). So much goodness in one place!

6. The Sanctuary

<http://www.thesanctuaryarts.org/>

Looking for an art gallery where you can learn to paint while munching on delicious foods and sipping a craft brew? Head on out to The Sanctuary Centre for the Arts in Ridgeway. This beautifully renovated church offers ambience and an amazing experience for those looking to rent a hall for an event or attend an awesome class. It offers an array of classes to support local arts development and good times – check out the kids' art and theatre classes or the belly dancing for fun!

7. Silvestri Sports

<http://silvestrisports.com/>

High quality customized clothing and sports apparel have been available from this Welland-business since 1987. Owned and operated by Shawn Marcoux, this awesome local shop also manufactures what they sell! They offer screening and embroidery, and employ a professional seamstress for customization so you can get the team wear you want with the details you love. Whether you're a die-hard Leafs fan looking for a jersey, a local sporting team in need of new apparel, or a local company looking for a great way to promote your business, they've got something for you.

8. Willow Den

<http://willow-den.myshopify.com/>

A smiling face can always be found in this gem of a store. Located in St. Catharines, Willow Den offers unique treasures for your home, body, and spirit. You'll find one-of-a-kind and handmade items, including locally made and fair-trade international pieces. Browse their collection of books on self help, Buddhism, or meditation, and then look through their selection of gemstones, candles, instruments, or incense to ground you in your practice. Grab a hand-carved wooden artefact to decorate your home, a silver necklace to decorate your body, or a salt lamp to soothe your soul. If you can't find what you're looking for, owners Susan and Karel Zavadil will be happy to guide you!

9. Beechwood Donuts

<http://www.beechwooddoughnuts.com/>

You've seen the lines. You've witnessed the pure delight when someone bites into one of their hand-crafted vegan donuts. It's your turn! Stop into the downtown St. Catharines shop and feast your senses on the collection of exquisite donuts that has Niagara happily rubbing their bellies. Oh, and be sure to try the cinnamon sugar donuts if you want to support Niagara even more (a portion of the proceeds from every one of these donuts is given to YWCA of Niagara).

10. The Guru: Fine Indian Cuisine

<http://www.welcometoguru.com/>

Speaking of bellies, you have to check out this awesome Niagara Falls restaurant (you'll likely see me there if you do!). I can't say enough about the taste and the experience The Guru offers, so I'll let them say it for me: it is [our philosophy that great food begins with exceptional ingredients, delicately balanced herbs and spices and most of all, the patience to develop a harmony of flavour. It is the difference between eating and dining.](#) I'd say its just like mom used to make, but it may be better... um, my parents aren't big Internet users, but can we keep that last point between us? You know, just in case. Thanks!

How Can You Be Awesome?

In the spirit of growth, feel free to add some of your favourite Niagara businesses to this list. Share this post and tag an awesome local business or attraction. Who knows what local treasures are waiting to be found? Together we can support one another and grow a greater Niagara. Sing it with me now, "You can count on me 'cause I can count on you."