UP AGAINST THE WAL-MART

Local merchants, once buoyed by Wal-Mart’s entrance into the market, are now finding it difficult to compete with the retail giant’s low prices and wide selection.

Many small businesses are struggling to stay afloat as Wal-Mart continues to expand its footprint in the area. The supermarket giant has been known to offer lower prices and a wider variety of goods than local competitors, putting pressure on smaller businesses to adapt or risk falling behind.

"We've been seeing a lot of businesses struggling," said Bob Smith, owner of a local hardware store. "Wal-Mart has taken a lot of business from us, and it's been tough to compete.

Smith is not alone in his concerns. Many small businesses in the region have reported a decrease in sales since Wal-Mart moved in. Some have even been forced to close their doors.

"It's just too much," said Mary Johnson, owner of a local bakery. "Wal-Mart's prices are so much lower that we can't compete.

Despite the challenges, some small businesses are finding ways to stay afloat. Many are looking to diversify their offerings and target niche markets.

"We're trying to find ways to stand out," said Johnson. "We're offering specialty items that Wal-Mart doesn't have.

Others are working with local suppliers to offer unique products that can't be found elsewhere.

"We're sourcing locally whenever possible," said Smith. "It's good for the community and it helps support local businesses.

But for many, the challenge remains. The pressure from Wal-Mart is intense, and it's difficult to keep up.

"We're doing our best," said Johnson. "But it's tough.

For now, small businesses are holding their own, but the long-term impact of Wal-Mart's presence in the area is uncertain. Some worry that the retail giant will continue to grow, further squeezing out smaller competitors.

"It's a tough time," said Smith. "But we're hanging in there.

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