

# *Some Asheville stores accepting illegal coins*

## *Group says Liberty Dollar legitimate*

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An alternative currency accepted by some Asheville merchants and other businesses nationwide has drawn fire from the U.S. Mint.

The Liberty Dollar, made in an Idaho mint by the National Organization for the Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act, are silver and gold medallions that also are available in paper and electronic forms.

Matthew Pitagora, a NORFED regional deputy officer, said the Liberty Dollar is an attempt to back currency on something tangible, unlike the U.S. currency.

"This is finite metal-based currency. No one can create money out of thin air."

According to a U.S. Mint press release, the Liberty Dollar is not backed by the U.S. government, and the use of it as circulating money is considered a federal crime.

More than 80 of the 4,000 U.S. shops that accept Liberty Dollars are in Asheville.

Krista Stearns, owner of the West End Bakery & Cafe, said she bought Liberty Dollars but stopped using them primarily because people didn't seem interested.

"I never talked to any other business owners that were particularly endorsing them. It didn't really seem to take hold here," she said.

"We may have done five transactions in six months. Obviously other people were having a hard time thinking it was a good idea."

UNC-Asheville does not accept Liberty Dollars.

"We are not doing so, since obviously they are illegal and not appropriate currency," said Pat Hunt, UNC-A vice chancellor for finance and operations.

"I've talked to constituents on campus who accept cash, and they have not had any students try to use them."

Pitagora said that NORFED acknowledges the Liberty Dollar is not legal tender, but that the group considers it legitimate as an alternative form of currency.

"We have to sign an agreement that we will not represent it as legal tender and not represent it

as a coin."

He said that the Liberty Dollar boasts similar features as U.S. coins, including the phrase "Trust in God" as opposed to "In God We Trust."

He added that the Liberty Dollar has a distinct appearance besides the difference of phrases.

"I have a hard time believing that somebody could mistake a Liberty for U.S. coinage," he said.

"'In God We Trust' is more of a request. And 'Trust in God' is a mandate. And the Liberty Dollar is a mandate back to an honest currency system."

Other than a press release and letters sent to NORFED regional officers, Pitagora said, the U.S. Mint has not taken any action against the Liberty Dollar.

He said the 20 million Liberty Dollars in circulation are a small amount compared to the almost \$800 billion worth of U.S. coins and currency in circulation.

Jane Anderson, vice president of member services and communications at the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber hasn't had any issues with the Liberty Dollar because its members generally don't use the currency.

"We really haven't had any experiences on this matter. It hasn't been an issue here in Asheville."

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