



## NEWS

# Kawartha Lakes businesses, mayor talk risks of hot spot holiday shoppers

Business owner says she doesn't 'feel right stigmatizing someone' for the number of sick people in their area

By Sarah Sobanski Kawartha Lakes This Week

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Toronto and Peel Region are in lockdown heading into the holiday season. That leaves few options for millions of holiday shoppers: head online and risk shipping delays, take advantage of curbside pickup if it's available or head somewhere that isn't shut down.

Top health officials are recommending that people restrict non-essential travel and

avoid crossing COVID-19 borders. John Tory, mayor of Toronto, followed Premier Doug Ford's shutdown announcement by asking area residents to stay home and avoid flocking to malls.

But – as has been the dilemma throughout this nearly nine-month-long pandemic – some people listen, some people don't.

Arianna Jeffries, who opened the Kawartha Artisan Market in Fenelon Falls with her mom, Christine Webster, in October, says the market has had a lot of foot traffic since it first opened.

"A lot of people have been shopping local this year," she says, noting customers have had to wait to come in on busy Saturdays with COVID-19 restrictions.

Jeffries suspects some of her customers have been from larger urban centres, including cottagers – they've told her as much. She suspects more people will be coming from hot spots now that the province is seeing another round of shutdowns. She admits that makes her nervous.

"I feel like because people can't shop in the city, they have been shopping in our store," she says, noting the store showcases 55 local vendors. "Everyone's been doing so well to keep it low down here, and they're going to bring it."

At the end of the day, however, there has to be a balance because customers are customers, she says. She hasn't had a problem with anyone following protocols, noting, "Everyone has been really good."

Darlene Algire, owner of Houghton Creek in Lindsay's downtown, says she isn't going to refuse customers because of where they're from. She says she doesn't want to label an entire area because of their number of sick people.

"You may live in a community that has a high level of sick people, but you've done everything to keep yourself safe. You shouldn't be denied things because of it," she says. "I don't feel right stigmatizing someone."

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Houghton Creek has been busier than ever since September, Algire says. She says she's hoping that traffic will help sustain her through the beginning of next year, when the city will start the next phase of its downtown reconstruction.

"I've had some customers tell me that they've made every effort possible to shop local since the pandemic," she says, noting the store carries a lot of Ontario and Canadian-made products.

She can't say for sure if the uptick is due to customers from out of town, but she hasn't had anyone say so. She suspects the increase might be due in part to snowbirds who've stayed home this year and people being in their home spaces more, so they're looking to install the finer details found at the home decor shop.

"There's no guarantee that the people that are coming here are sick," she says, adding that someone from Lindsay is just as likely to bring back COVID-19 if they travel to the city.

"I feel reasonably comfortable that things will be OK if we see visitors," she says.

Kawartha Lakes Mayor Andy Letham says he's concerned COVID-19 numbers in the area will increase despite residents and businesses doing their best to be safe. He says there's a "huge disparity" between people who are taking the pandemic seriously and those who are not.

"Hospitals across the country are seeing increases in cases with people dying everyday, yet for some, unless it is affecting someone in your family, or someone you know, (they ask) what's the big deal," he says.

"If you truly feel the need to control the pandemic, and reduce it spreading, then the whole province must be shut down, so there is no value in going anywhere else."

Letham notes that the pandemic can't be legislated away. He says many businesses rely on out-of-town visitors and have invested in creating a safe environment for customers. That has to be balanced with local citizens' concerns about the increasing risk.

"We are talking about livelihoods, not just profits," he says. "We are going to have to make good decisions as individuals and not focus on what everyone else is doing, because we can't control that."

Letham recommends that customers stay home if they feel a business isn't creating a safe environment for them to shop.

"We all have protocols to follow and we need to depend on common sense," he says. "I believe there is enough of it out there that we will get through this without another lockdown in this area."

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