

LANDLORDS WORKING TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES: DBIA MANAGER

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businesses face a challenge. With a large commuter population, out of convenience, residents of often shop where they work.

While COVID-19 certainly hasn't been good for businesses - many of them just struggling to survive while having to shut down for extended periods - the pandemic has had one positive effect with more people working from home.

"What's happened is the reverse. Commuters are discovering what their town has to offer," says Kathleen Dills, general manager of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce. "People are staying home, and they're recognizing the value of community."

Kuiken was able to operate online and take orders by email, but has certainly noticed a difference since reopening his store in late May as part of Stage 1 of the provincial plan.

"Because people are home more, shopping local has never been stronger," he said. "My foot traffic is probably up 300 per cent and phone calls have quadrupled."

While that's good news, the reality is that businesses lost the revenue from an entire quarter of a year, of-

"People are staying home, and they're recognizing the value of community."

- Kathleen Dills, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce GM

ten while still having to pay operating expenses.

"Businesses that were closed for three months, they're not getting that money back," Dills said.

Damian Szybalski, director of economic development, innovation and culture for the Town of Halton Hills said businesses have experienced significant challenges while closed during the pandemic, but their recovery will be important for the town.

"Ninety-eight per cent of Halton Hills business are considered small businesses and their success is crucial to the economic prosperity of our community," he said.

Downtown Georgetown BIA manager Yaw Ennin said landlords have worked with businesses to renegotiate leases. That has played a big part in no business closures in the downtown during the pandemic.

In his previous job in Windsor, Ennin said there was not only cross-border shopping to compete with, but also several BIAs competing for the local business. That hasn't been the

case in Halton Hills, where the Chamber, the two downtown BIAs and the Georgetown Market Place have all been working together to promote local initiatives.

Ennin said the town's decision to allow sidewalk patios is just one measure put in place that will help the recovery.

"We're able to offer something that brings people to the downtown," he said. "And then you hope that after lunch they'll stay and check out some of the retail stores."

The key for the businesses will be to maintain any momentum they gain from having people home more.

Downtown Acton BIA co-ordinator Alex Hilson said for those who didn't shop locally before, this is an ideal time to learn about the benefits, including an increased level of service.

Hilson said the benefits go beyond the bottom line of one business.

"The people you support through shopping local, they're our neighbours. They're the people who

support our charitable events and our school fundraisers," he said. "When you support them, you raise the whole community up."

Dills added that its often the small businesses that employ high school and university students, often giving them their first work experience, as well as seniors.

Kuiken has already hired an extra person to help with deliveries since reopening.

He's confident in his ability to hold on to his new customers once they realize his prices are competitive with the big box stores and they he can deliver service they can't.

"If you need a fridge today, I can get you one," he said.

And with that, he's off to make a delivery.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: While it's no secret that the economic impact of COVID-19 has been felt by countless businesses, it seems there may be one bright spot to the lengthy lockdown. Through a store owner and the heads of the Chamber of Commerce and DBIA, we explore how more people are discovering the value of shopping locally while working from home.

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SUGAR SHACK REOPENS

BRYAN MYERS
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Bryan Myers/Torstar
Michelle Rogerson (left) and her mother, Julie Greenslade.

A sweet business has reopened in the 'sweet' heart of downtown Georgetown.

Michelle Rogerson recently reopened Sugar Shack at a new location in downtown Georgetown.

While Rogerson said she had hoped to be back in business at the new location in May, delays pushed the reopening to July.

Originally, Sugar Shack was a part of Sweetie Pies, where Rogerson prepared a range of fare from sandwiches to savoury pies and desserts, but when the business closed down in April, Rogerson chose to relocate in the heart of the downtown.

Rogerson's mother, Julie Greenslade, owned Sweetie Pies, and before that the George and Dragon for 18 years, most of which with Rogerson employed.

Rogerson's sister, Allison Craig, took over ownership of another downtown Georgetown eatery, The Cellar.

While the food service industry has been a family business, Rogerson branched into baking on

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her own.

"It started with a cake pan," Rogerson said. "I'm completely self-taught."

She said she recalls it was an oversized cupcake pan that started her baking career.

"I watched a tutorial and made a fancy rose cake," she said. "Then I decided to bake a cake every Sunday, for my own benefit, to learn."

It didn't take long for friends and co-workers to start commissioning cakes.

"Two years later, I'm here, and I'm a lot better at cakes," Rogerson said.

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