

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES 'OVERWHELMING'

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"I think anyone who's actually willing to open a business in the middle of a global pandemic obviously is an entrepreneur at heart," said Melanie Frazer, executive director of the Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce.

"They love their business model, they believe in their product and they're willing to take a risk. If you look at those businesses, they've all done very well because they have a lot of energy behind them."

She said there've been plenty of service-based small businesses, which have opened locally over the past 15 months that local residents may not have noticed as they don't have storefronts, such as those doing bookkeeping, taxes, marketing and social media management.

Some of these people may have been laid off or at

risk of losing their jobs during the pandemic and decided to fulfill their dreams of owning a business, noted Frazer. One new service that does have high visibility is Pampered Pooch Spaw & Boutique, which is celebrating its one-year anniversary on Mountainview Road South in Georgetown.

"Things are going very, very well — greater than I ever expected," said owner Deborah Rule. "I can't believe I wake up and have a job to come to at all, let alone my own business."

Since opening, Rule has been so busy that she had to hire two groomers to keep up with the demand that's largely resulted from the influx in people adding puppies to their families during the pandemic.

"We see so many puppies — it's non-stop," she said, noting she and her staff are also striving to ed-

ucate new dog owners about grooming, suggested frequency, etc.

The local business was impacted by the province-wide closures that happened from December to February, which Rule said was challenging for her groomers as they weren't making an income during that period. But once they reopened, Rule said Pampered Pooch's loyal clientele returned full force, with their calendar being booked up to mid-July already.

"The community's overwhelming support has exceeded my expectations," she said. "It's been a very successful year."

In downtown Acton, another entrepreneur says she has also experienced great success since opening last July.

Concept Leather Company owner Zina Pallister has been busy creating a



Melanie Hennessey/Metroland
Pampered Pooch Spaw and Boutique owner Deborah Rule, pictured with French bulldog Bullseye, is so busy since opening last year that she hired two groomers.

wide variety of handmade leather products, from horse equipment and jackets to motorcycle gear, handbags, wallets, custom pieces and more.

Things are going so well

for the new venture that Pallister just moved across the street to a bigger, more prominent location.

"It's been quite a ride, I'll tell you that," she said. "First, there was the initial

fear, the same as any other business that opens at any time. But the people in this town are incredible. As soon as they found I was here, a lot of them went out of their way to be supportive."

With an increased focus on shopping local, she said her customers are excited to see that her products are genuinely handmade with as many Canadian products as she can source.

"It's a sector of the economy that has kind of gone by the wayside, but I think it's becoming more important to people," she said.

As pandemic restrictions ease, Pallister said she's looking forward to welcoming local residents into her new location for hands-on classes.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With COVID-19 restrictions continuing to impact businesses, we wanted to examine how local entrepreneurs who chose to open during the pandemic are doing now.

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