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Latest wave of local businesses weather COVID-19 closure storm

By Vera Kochan



Loard's Ice Cream shop Photo Vera Kochan

Susan Marconi found ways to provide items to customers during the closure by setting up endcaps stocked with merchandise in the hardware store across the road in addition to offering curbside service. She also displayed her wares on Instagram and Constant Contact. Proud to have a good relationship with her suppliers, Marconi was able to always have a supply of necessary items that were sold out elsewhere.

Marconi typically restocks the store in January and February, so she was lucky to have a bounty of merchandise before the closure. Her most popular sellers were candles, dish towels and lots of soap. "We lost business during the closure, but what's really nice is that people have been so happy to come in and shop," said Marconi. "People are coming in to walk around, to get the social exposure that isn't part of their immediate family. The first thing they do when they come in is take a deep breath."

Loard's Ice Cream opened recently much to the delight of the young and young at heart. Staff member Tom Higgins replied, "People were super happy to be getting ice cream - especially the kids who used to come in here after school." According to Higgins, business was booming from the minute the doors were allowed to open. A big disappointment for Loard's was the canceling of the Summer Concert Series, which is an additional revenue source for the shop. "I've been coming here since I was a kid," stated Higgins, "and there's a bond in coming to work for a local business."

Rheem Shopping Center's Glam Palace, a hair salon, typically operates by appointment only. Owner Rania Atout is currently booked three months in advance. "Recently I have gotten a lot of walk-ins. People are out walking their dogs, see that I'm open and ask if they could get a hair cut." Besides hair cuts, the most popular request is a root touch-up.

Atout says that business has come back better than ever since the closure was lifted. She has even received new clients coming in from Alameda County where hair salons weren't allowed to open yet. Priding herself on following the latest safety guidelines, Atout now has some new customers who weren't happy with their regular salon's lack of social distancing procedures.

Also in Rheem, Dover Saddlery, a horse tack and supply store, was initially required to close in mid-March, but reopened 10 days later for limited purposes, because they were the only local business that provided first aid products, liniments and supplement supplies for horses.

Store Manager Christie Casazza, whose first day on the job was Feb. 1, explained that services opened up gradually, and on "April 15 we were open by appointment only and allowed 1-2 people in the store per hour. On June 1 we were open to the public." During the closure, customers came from as far away as San Jose and Sacramento to get horse supplies.

Countless businesses across the United States have had to suffer the moniker of "non-essential" during the coronavirus outbreak. As such, they are among the last to reopen their doors and the longest to have worried when their turn would finally come.

Due to the new upturn in COVID-19 infections, Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered restaurants, wineries, family entertainment centers, movie theatres, museums, zoos and cardrooms to halt indoor operations for at least three weeks as of July 1. He also ordered full closure of all bars and breweries including both indoor and outdoor operations in the hopes that such gathering spots would not contribute to the growing number of positive cases.

Among the Moraga businesses happy to be open again is Across The Way, a gift and home goods store located in the Moraga Shopping Center. Merchandise Manager



Glam Palace Photo Vera Kochan



Dover Saddlery Photo Vera Kochan

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