

SMALL TOWN BUSINESSES KEEP A SENSE OF COMMUNITY THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

The mid-March shutdowns caused by the novel coronavirus sent shockwaves throughout America, and small businesses in Nebraska have tried to minimize the impact felt in the local communities.

Michael Goodwater, owner of Goody's Grille in Battle Creek, recalls sales experiencing an uptick despite only offering take-out meals when the pandemic first started.

"We just arranged our schedule and people were very receptive of it and we ended up having very good business through the whole thing," Goodwater said. "I think people just wanted to have some sense of normalcy to try and get through it."

Residents in Battle Creek, located about 10 miles west of Norfolk, supported their local businesses. Goodwater said people came together to help other businesses in need.

"Our bar owner, he had to close completely," Goodwater said. "But people were calling him and wanting a case of beer or pizza and he would accommodate that. Small towns really stepped up and really helped out to keep us here and keep us going."

Another business affected by the coronavirus was the Niobrara Trading Post, located on Walnut Street in Niobrara. Lance Lundberg, owner of this local convenience store, remembered the community's reaction..

"I think with the initial shock everybody stayed home for the first month," Lundberg said of the northeast Nebraska community. "It definitely affected business."

As time went on, however, and people became more cautious of the precautions and sought out a sense of regularity, businesses recovered.

"After a certain amount of time locked in your house, you're ready to go out and do the things that you normally do," Lundberg said. "You can come here and get a lunch special, you can come here and eat and get a beverage, and I think it adds to things feeling normal."

Kelly Bequette, who co-owns The Keeping Room, a cafe in Nebraska City, with her husband Bryan recalls the initial hardships of trying to social distance in such unknown circumstances. They tried to do everything they could to keep 6 feet away from customers, but said it was a difficult thing to do since they're always working with people within 6 feet.

Bequette has seen the community grow closer as time has gone on.

“I think our town took it very seriously and they still are taking it pretty seriously, but I think there is a point where you have to learn to live your life,” Bequette said. “Eventually people say, ‘I’m going to do some things, but I’m just going to do them smarter.’”

Beyond her business specifically, Bequette said the pandemic has revealed something about the tight-knit nature of Nebraska City.

“There’s no one in this town that would have to get groceries if they didn’t feel comfortable since we have no many churches, organizations and individuals that will help,” Bequette said. “I think we are very protective of our at-risk groups.”

Even amongst the craziness that comes with a pandemic, Bequette sees a bright side these hard times endured by her community.

“We have more time with our neighbors; we have more time with our family,” she said. “Although we’ve had to change a lot of things and a lot of people have sacrificed financially, it really has helped that we get to make decisions and be outside if we’re far enough apart.”