

SMALL BUSINESS SURVIVAL KIT: ADAPT, CREATE, LOOK AHEAD

By Nan Devlin,
Executive Director,
Tillamook County
Visitors Association

Since mid-March of 2020, nearly 20 months ago, our community – and world – has been dealing with a global pandemic. Here in Pacific City, an area built on the strength small businesses, the impact of COVID has been more than challenging. Our business owners have gone from feeling panic and worry, to surfing the waves of ever-changing guidelines, to seeing light at what is hopefully an end to the pandemic.

Immediate impact: drastic drop in revenue

In that month of March, lodging, boat launches, several parks and restrooms, indoor dining, events, museums, and several retailers were shut down. This was a move to help prevent the spread of COVID, but it also prevented many people from making a living from their small business. It was a frightening time. Tillamook Coast Visitors Association conducted surveys and interviews with 76 businesses from different sectors of the tourism industry and found how big an impact this made:

Lodging	90% drop in revenue	Big layoffs; open to essential workers only
Boat launches	100% drop in revenue	Crew layoffs; charters shut down
Restaurants	65% drop in revenue	Take-out only; no indoor dining; layoffs
Farmers/Fishers	74% drop in revenue	Restaurants closed; wholesale markets cut
Museums/venues	100% drop in revenue	No indoor events; fundraisers stopped

One dory charter owner said he had to refund \$10,000 in cancelled fishing trips. “I’m hoping the phone doesn’t ring again with someone wanting a refund,” he said. And he stated that with boat launch areas closed, even locals couldn’t supply fish for their families.

However, the community rallied to support small business. Donations were made to food banks; meals provided to furloughed employees and community members in need; the PCNV Chamber donated funds; COVID supplies were provided; social services, such as CARE, helped with rent funds; relief grants were made available, generously matched with funds from the Tillamook County Creamery Association.

Second wave impact: crisis in staffing, added expenses

When businesses were able to open, it was with major restrictions and limited capacity. Indoor dining was still not an option for many restaurants, and they had added expenses with plexiglass barriers, outdoor dining seating, takeout supplies. Lodging left rooms vacant for at least 24 hours in order to meet additional cleaning requirements. Charter boats resumed but with much fewer guests and crew in order to meet safe distancing requirements. Retail shops created directional pathways, with hand sanitizer at the door and allowing only a few people at a time inside.

But the nature of small business owners is to survive. So, they adapted, got creative and did the best they could with what they had. One restaurant owner said, “This place has been in business for 60 years. I don’t want it going down on my watch.”

The biggest hurdle at this time was staffing: people were concerned about



Photo courtesy of Tillamook County Visitors Association

Timm and Tammy Lakey, owners of Beach Walk (formerly Beach Wok) adapted to Covid guidelines and supply shortages by revising their menu, limiting hours of operation, and providing takeout and outdoor seating.

coming back to work, not only for health reasons, but also because of the stress of dealing with people who refused to wear masks. In addition, with schools closed and little to no childcare, many working parents had no choice but to stay home.

Changes did happen

Four restaurant owners made the decision to retire; fortunately, all sold their businesses and buildings to locals and relocated newcomers. Two restaurants closed permanently, one moved to a larger location. One restaurant diversified, buying a market and storage unit. And as food supplies became

more difficult to get, many restaurants limited their menu items and hours of operation.

Four retailers closed, others adopted online sales platforms. One retailer expanded by buying a building and remodeling it for an additional business. Pacific City saw four new businesses open during this time.

Lodging businesses, needing staffing at all levels, rented homes and set aside rooms in their hotels for employees to live. To make up for lost revenue and higher costs, lodging owners and managers throughout the county raised their rates. As four managers said, “no one blinked an eye.” And that has proven true: as of June 30, gross lodging receipts have already exceeded 2019 levels.

Farmers and fishers resumed work, even with regional markets remaining down, especially for those who sold to Portland restaurants. But one farm expanded, tripling their crop output. And of course, our dairy farms continued as usual – cows need to be milked!

Lingering impact, but eyes on the future

The late summer appearance of the delta variant of Covid-19 dealt another blow not only to individuals and families, but to businesses as well. Venues cancelled events, festivals didn’t happen as planned, restaurants faced even greater supply issues due to a severe lack of truck drivers.

However, riding the Covid wave proved something very valuable: small businesses can survive tough times by being creative, adaptive, resourceful and forward thinking. And they survive because the community supports them. Stop by a small business and thank them for their resiliency.