

BUSINESSES FACE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 May 2020 05:35



Small businesses across the City of Gallup are feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing, and measures by the state of New Mexico to help slow the spread of the novel virus.

When Governor Michelle Lujan-Grisham announced late in March that non-essential businesses would have to close, Rhonda and her husband Ryan Quintana's family-owned business, Quintana's Music and Indian Jewelry on West Coal Avenue, was one of the non-essential businesses that had to shut down.

What's harder for the Quintanas is that they do not qualify for the two Small Business Administration's relief efforts; the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan.

The Quintanas are not sure how long they can continue on with the business in the current situation.

"We're getting no money in, none," Rhonda Quintana said. "There's nothing that we qualify for. There's no federal aid. There's no statewide aid. There's nothing coming to us."

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Prior to the pandemic, Quintana's Music and Indian Jewelry had its most successful year, seeing a profit and installation jobs.

"We were able to provide equipment. We grew our entertainment company. We started doing shows with the city," she said.

The Quintanas are now trying to sell some of the musical items on eBay.

Quintana is hoping local initiatives like the Gallup MainStreet, Gallup-McKinley County Chamber and the Gallup Business Improvement District can lobby for businesses like her family's.

"They need to get together and create a plan for downtown," she said. "...They're going to have to think outside of the box."

The Quintanas send out their prayers, well wishes and support into the community and across the country.

"If someone is struggling and they don't have food, we'll help with their food," Quintana said. "Keep the faith, keep preparing, find a way to survive through these terrible times."

Just down the road from Quintana's is Maria's Restaurant. Jerry and Maria Guillen have owned their business for 37 years.

The Guillens said their sales are down, but their restaurant's two employees continue to work at the establishment and deliver within the city limits.

"It helps keep people home instead of traveling or coming down town," Maria Guillen said.

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Patrons have been ordering family packs of food from their restaurant for meals.

“People are happy to order a dozen tacos with rice and beans for their dinner,” she said.

The restaurant has not applied for financial relief from the federal government.

The Guillens have not had to lay off any workers during the pandemic. They say their faith in God is helping them through these unprecedented times.

“I pray for a lot of people, and I’m thankful my family is OK. But, our prayers go out especially to a few customers that we know that are in the hospital right now and having difficulty,” she added.

“We’re trying to help them in a certain way, but they’re very distraught right now,” she said.

Sammy and Marie Choida own two businesses in Gallup, Sammy C’s and The Rocket Cafe. Their eateries can still operate under the state’s new restrictions so long as their restaurants close their dining areas and limit orders to take out.

Sammy C’s is temporarily closed, but The Rocket Cafe continues to fill takeout orders. Marie Chioda says business is down 70 percent at the restaurant, and their standalone liquor store has been closed since April 6.

“Since they closed the liquor store down, I’ve had to open up another portion of business to grocery shopping for the local community, because they have their fears of going into the larger grocery stores,” Marie Chioda said.

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Chioda said The Rocket Cafe staff is working with gloves and masks, and continues to disinfect doors, door handles, and counters at least once an hour.

The restaurant employs about 25 people between the bar, liquor store, and restaurant.

At the restaurant alone, 12 people are employed, however, they are not working full-time hours.

“They took the day, the time frame that I’m going to be open during the daytime, and they split the hours amongst those who were willing to work,” she said. “They’ll work a two-to-three hour shift.”

“...My two lead cooks, who have been there for 20 years, have not only taken a cut in hours, they have a substantial cut in pay, and I mean substantial. They don’t want to lose their job,” she added.

Chioda is unsure how long the cafe can continue under the current conditions, but estimated about three to four months.

If the liquor store could reopen, she said the restaurant could stay open longer.

Chioda says she has applied for the PPP federal relief aid at her local bank to provide for her employees.

The biggest lesson the Chiodas have learned through this pandemic is to take nothing for granted.

“Everything changed on a dime,” she said. “The recovery and to come back from this is going to take some time.”

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