

Together Apart. These words have become a guiding message for America during the pandemic, but none more than our businesses have exemplified that message. As the country has struggled with essential supply shortages, increased unemployment, economic recession, rising suicide rates and depression, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, businesses have stepped up to fill the void. International and local businesses have adapted their business models to help people cope during the pandemic. Leading communities with their generous donations and innovative technology, they have become pillars of support for communities. While businesses have been crucial to our communities by providing support to healthcare workers, students, and low-income/at-risk, they have also worked tirelessly to help Americans be hopeful.

Businesses have made generous contributions towards helping our healthcare workers and providing essential medical supplies. In the early stages of the pandemic, America grappled with a shortage of masks, gloves, and other protective equipment. Fortunately, many local businesses stepped up to fill the void. An online retailer based in Germantown, Discount Ramps, helped distribute over 2,000 masks to numerous hospitals in Washington County and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area. Many businesses have done similar things, donating booties and masks. Through this protective equipment, businesses saved lives. Many didn't stop there, they also innovated to create new things to make the lives of healthcare workers easier. In Brookfield, EmOpti, a tech company, created software to help medical staff manage emergency rooms more efficiently. The software allowed doctors to perform an initial, virtual triage of patients to decrease waiting room time. In doing so, they curbed the strain on hospital staff who were already struggling to cope with the high influx of patients and made everyone safer by decreasing needless contact in the emergency room. Through generous donations and innovative efforts, businesses have supported our healthcare workers.

Students were not left out by the efforts of businesses to sustain our communities. As the pandemic raged, millions of schools around America were forced to close. Businesses have stepped up, providing schools and students with the technology and supplies to continue learning from home. Boswell Book Co., a book store in Milwaukee, helped distribute books to families in need and, partnering with T-Mobile, helped distribute money to MPS families to help pay for internet and technology. Similarly, MKE Tech Hub has donated over 100 ipads to Milwaukee middle-schoolers. These contributions have especially helped students from low-income families who didn't have access to appreciate technology and, without these generous contributions, would have fallen behind their peers. However, it's not just technology that determines the quality of one's education. Students whose families aren't able to get enough food can't focus on learning. The Milwaukee Urban League recognized the importance of a full stomach on education and worked to provide meals to students at home. Having a full stomach can make all the difference for kids who are already struggling to cope with the new reality and losses. The leadership of local WI businesses has lifted students and given them a better chance at a prosperous future.

Disproportionately hurt by the pandemic, minorities and low-income families have been supported by businesses. Businesses have creatively worked to provide food for those struggling to pay and even help them pay for medical bills, rent, and utilities. A bakery in Cudahy, Angelic Bakehouse, has been donating two loaves of bread to Feeding America to match every purchase. Sargento Foods Inc, a family-owned cheese company in Plymouth, has donated over two million dollars to the Hunger Task Force and Feeding America. They have also supplied nearly sixteen million cheese sticks to help feed over a million households in WI. Families struggling with medical bills and pandemic unemployment have been sustained through these efforts. The

families who have been supported by these efforts will have better chances and be more motivated to succeed post pandemic because of these efforts.

While many have overlooked the lasting psychological effects of the pandemic, businesses, fortuitously, haven't forgotten. During the pandemic, America has seen rising rates of suicide and depression. Not being able to see and care for their ill loved ones, people have felt alone and devoid of hope. Businesses like Milwaukee Pretzel Co. have taken to spreading hope. Milwaukee Pretzel Co. is making heart-shaped pretzels for Feeding America. While seeming like a small thing, this has brought hope to the thousands who have to receive them. Hope in these times has made all the difference to so many people. Hope has saved lives, and businesses are making sure to maximize the joy they spread. Miller High Life ran a contest giving three engaged couples who had to cancel their weddings because of Covid a chance to have a "Wedding at Your Doorstep" and receive \$10,000 for a honeymoon. Events like these don't just cheer up the people who win but bring joy to entire neighborhoods. When people aren't able to congratulate or see each other in person, they can show their well-wishes through signs in the window and feel a part of the experience. Mental health is just as important as physical necessities during a crisis, and businesses have worked to improve mental health in their communities.

During times of crisis, America often sees businesses step up to support their community; however, during the Covid Pandemic, businesses have gone above and beyond innovating and adapting to help everyone from healthcare workers to low-income family students while lifting spirits. Through dark times, it is always important to look for the light, and during the pandemic, it has been the local businesses that have provided the light. They have innovated and adapted to the new norms to help their communities and will continue to do so long after the pandemic.

While people have seen a spotlight on businesses like Miller High Life and Angelic Bakehouse during the pandemic for helping their communities, people must remember that there are always businesses doing good work helping their neighborhoods and recognize after the pandemic.

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