

Business is a Force for Good

The past year has been a mix of struggles and opportunities. As a community, we have united together to overcome this global pandemic and rise up better on the other side. The area businesses and schools have unified behind a common mission to create a safe, thriving community that supports each other economically, educationally, and socially.

For starters, some of the larger area businesses and chain stores began offering drive-up for groceries and other essentials. The ease to which this transition was made was extraordinary. Online shopping became even easier and more popular when masked drivers could simply pull into a marked spot, lift his/her trunk, and the groceries were placed in the back of the vehicle. Walmart, Target, and Pick 'n Save truly mastered the ease of this process. This allowed all area citizens to feel safe while also protecting the essential workers. This process actually led to some economic gains.

With many businesses in lock down, a vast majority of customer service workers found themselves unemployed. However, this new drive-up service created a need for personal shoppers. In fact, Walmart nearly doubled the number of personal shoppers over the past year, and nationally, Walmart employed 157,000 people in this position. This allowed individuals to continue to get a paycheck while safely navigating the stores.

In addition to offering curbside pick-up, these large corporate businesses set a standard for safety so that people could feel comfortable going to their stores. Greeters were required to count the number of people in and out of the store to comply with state mandated site numbers. Markers were placed on the floors to move traffic in the same direction and to mark 6-foot separations between people. Stores like Kohls, have closed a set of doors to keep foot traffic flowing in one direction. Sanitizer and free masks are available at each of these locations. These national chains set a standard for safety in our community.

Unfortunately, while the big box stores were continuing to thrive, small locally owned businesses were struggling. In fact, according to the Green Bay Press Gazette, small businesses are down 42% economically from where they were a year ago. This has caused many businesses to shut down permanently, or look for other options. Some local businesses really stepped up during this global crisis. Brews Brothers is one of those businesses.

Brews Brothers is a small bar/restaurant located in Schofield, WI. They serve mostly beer and burgers. Over the past year, they cut their seating in half, required masks, sanitized between visitors, and required all staff to be masked at all times. This truly hit their bottom dollar. However, with community safety as their number one priority, they advertised their take-out menu, and they really focused on that aspect of their business. They put safety first which would give people peace of mind so that they felt confident ordering and picking up from this location.

Another local business that was truly a force for good is the Glass Nickel in Wausau. This restaurant was set to open just weeks before the state-at-home orders went into effect. It couldn't have been a more difficult time to try to open the doors and make a go of a new business. However, the Glass Nickel put safety first even during these trying times. They have very limited seating, the servers continue to be masked, all tables are socially distanced so that venturing out of your home for dinner feels safe and secure. This business puts the security of others over their economic gains.

A nontraditional “business” that really stepped up over the past year is our area schools. It became quickly apparent that as schools were closing then student and family needs were going to struggle. According to Feeding America, 22 million students depend on school breakfasts and lunches. As unemployment was rising, this number would rise as well. So with community support, the area schools provided free breakfasts and lunches daily to all students and adults in the community. This benefit continued throughout the entire year.

Socially, many children and adults were feeling isolated and struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic. In fact, according to the CDC, “More than 2 in 5 US residents report struggling with mental or behavioral health issues associated with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.” North Central Health Care in Wausau has a Crisis Assessment Reaction Team which responds to people in crises by being mobile and meeting the individuals where they are at. The need for their services has doubled over the past year and has literally been a life saver in our community. Isolation, depression, suicide have been an unfortunate consequence of COVID-19, whether someone was infected with the virus or not. So this business provides life saving support during a time of crises.

These are just a few of the area businesses that have been a Force for Good in our community. According to Dennis Prager, “Goodness is about character-integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like. More than anything else, it is about how we treat other people.” During the past year, these businesses put people’s safety and concern over their own economic gains. They valued human life, required masks when it was rejected by some members of the community, and held on. These businesses fed the community when they were hungry, gave people jobs where they were jobless, and held their hands when they were alone. As 2021 rolls into spring, vaccines are placed in people's arms, there is a light at the end of this dark tunnel. And we salute the businesses, frontline workers, teachers, healthcare workers and others that placed other’s lives over their own, and risked everything so that we could come out better on the other side.