

Alliston businesses adapting through COVID-19 crisis

Local restaurants have taken a hit as they closed their doors to dine-in traffic due to regulations surrounding COVID-19.

Roughly 20 restaurants in the Alliston Business Improvement Association (ABIA) are offering takeout or delivery services to remain open through the province's shutdown.

As eateries struggle with less customers, many other businesses who were declared non-essential by the province on March 23 have shutdown entirely, or have drastically reduced their services, making it difficult for some to pay rent.

"This will have a very negative impact on them even when the situation improves," noted Linda Spurr, General Manager of the ABIA.

She said the business community is a crucial part of making Alliston a vibrant community and it's important to support them through these times of uncertainty.

Throughout the year, local businesses support community fundraisers, school programs, sports teams, and other activities in town.

"Our local businesses are the very backbone of our community, providing jobs for local residents," Spurr said. "They provide a gathering place throughout the year and funding for community events."

The downtown business community in Alliston solely funds and sponsors the Farmers Market, Food Truck Rally, Rurban Sights and Sounds Downtown during the annual Potato Festival, Monster Mash, Christmas Crawl and other fun events each year.

To support downtown businesses who, in turn, support the community, it's important for the public to utilize online delivery and curbside pickup services locally.

"The local economy is counting on us to help by spending dollars in town," Spurr noted.

"It is a difficult time for most, and every bit of support to our local businesses makes a difference."

With nearly 5.5 million Canadians receiving federal aid through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) as of mid-April, many individuals aren't in a position to spend extra money.

However, those who are struggling financially can still support the local economy without spending a dime, by leaving positive reviews online.

"We have developed plans and are marketing our businesses through aggressive and innovative marketing campaigns such as our current Spring promotion "Hop Online and Shop Downtown Alliston," said Spurr.

The ABIA's #HopOnline campaign is running until the end of April and provides an opportunity to support local businesses while doing online gift shopping for spring birthdays or Mother's Day.

Those who participate in the campaign could win one of ten \$100 gift cards that can be spent at any ABIA businesses.

To enter, show the ABIA that you've supported one of its businesses by sharing a photo of a recent purchase on Facebook and tagging @DowntownallistonBIA or on Instagram and tag @Downtownalliston.

Alternatively, individuals can leave a positive Google Review on an ABIA businesses and notify them of it to enter the contest.

The gift card draw will take place on May 1 and winners will be notified through social media.

Currently, the ABIA is working behind the scenes with all levels of government to ensure its members are up to date on relief programs and grants.

They're also providing local businesses with the tools needed to continue to have a presence online.

The ABIA was created to support the promotion and development of the local businesses to create a vibrant downtown.

It is also meant to support established businesses, entice new ones, and validate Alliston's image as an independent, viable, progressive centre of commerce.

The Alliston BIA's follows its strategic plan, which includes several projects that focus on marketing, beautification, events, and communication.

Going forward, the organization will continue to serve its members through the COVID-19 crisis with up to date communications.

?We will continue to advocate for our ABIA Members and work with our partners in Simcoe County, OBIAA, our Town Council and Government Officials to ensure that local small business members' concerns are heard,? Spurr stressed.

Meanwhile, the Rurban Farmers Market opening day has been postponed from May 23 to June 6.

?The Alliston BIA will re-evaluate our situation and make a decision at the end of May as to any further changes in the market,? Spurr noted. ?The safety of our community is of the utmost importance to us.?

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