



214 Fair Street Kingston, NY 12401

www.UlsterChamber.org

Standing By Your Side

Chamber Helps Members Through Coronavirus

When the going gets tough, the tough get rolling full-steam ahead.

So it was during the initial days of the pandemic, particularly after the first case of coronavirus in Ulster County made headlines

The Ulster Chamber sprang into action to help the business community, particularly the small and most vulnerable, bracing for the economic fallout.

Even as the Chamber began postponing events based on the "social distancing" recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the staff was crafting innovative ways to keep Chamber members informed and connected.

The Chamber took the lead on creating social media forums for businesses to network digitally and get the word out about their products and services.

On March 18, the Chamber started the Facebook Group 'Ulster Eateries United' as a way to promote all the local restaurantsan industry deeply impacted by mandatory closures. The purpose of the group is to provide a central location for Ulster County restaurateurs and consumers to list specials, promotions, delivery and pickup options. The Group attracted thousands of members within hours of its creation.

Additionally, the Chamber created another Facebook Group, 'Ulster Small Businesses United' which has a similar purpose. Shortly after the page launched, hundreds of local small business owners were touting who they are and what they do.

As a temporary substitute for Networking Mixers, the Chamber launched a new social media campaign known as #Networking4U. Jess Davis, the Chamber's Director of Membership Engagement, is creating daily posts about the benefits of working with a fellow Chamber member for products and services.

When it comes to keeping members informed, the Chamber has been at the forefront by updating its website with live links on agencies like the Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Center that can offer additional help in the crisis.

Chamber President Ward Todd also lent his expertise in an hour-long Zoom conference call on COVID-19 with Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan and Lisa Berger, the county's economic development director. The March 17 forum was meant to educate business

owners on how to navigate the challenges ahead. More than 500 business owners tuned in and asked questions.

Todd said all the Chamber's efforts at this moment are focused on bolstering a shaken business community letting them know they are not

"Every industry will be touched by the coronavirus crisis in some form, but perhaps none more immediately than our local small businesses," he said. "While some businesses have made the difficult decision to close the doors for a period of time, others are modifying the way they operate and instituting digital options through this time.

"We want our Chamber members to know we stand

beside them and are here to assist in whatever way we can. That is our singular focus at this moment. As the situation changes almost

Ulster



hourly, many of our small businesses don't know where to turn or are unsure of what steps to take. We are here to offer the most up-to-date resources and point our members in the right direction to make it through," Todd said.



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Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce

Chamber News Editor

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'Uncharted Territory'

Area Restaurants Reinvent Themselves

There's almost nothing like a loaded taco and snappy margarita to make it feel like happy hour, even when you're stuck at home.

These days, home-bound Ulster County residents are enjoying such delicacies from restaurants like Santa Fe Uptown, keeping them going, while breaking the monotony of the dinner routine.

To stop the spread of the coronavirus, state leaders in mid-March ordered that restaurants and bars close, while still allowing them to offer take-out, including cocktails to-go.

Dave Amato, the owner of Ole Savannah Southern Table and Bar in Downtown Kingston, is doing his part to make sure people can still enjoy his authentic barbecue and comfort foods by offering take-out and delivery within a 5-mile radius.

"Before this happened, we did take-out, but it really wasn't our thing," he said. "What we're seeing is that everybody is rallying behind small businesses and restaurants. We've had a considerable amount of take-out, which is promising. At least it will keep a few people employed and us afloat."

Aware that people are cooped up in their homes with their children, Amato is diversifying and offering family dinners togo for as little as \$25.95, as well as his full menu.

"This is uncharted territory, and I just want to thank the community for their continued support through difficult times," he said.

Linda Bradford, owner of the recently opened Stone House Tavern, has quickly adapted to the new restaurant industry climate. She reached out to the chamber team with questions and concerns in the first few days when things seemed uncertain for restaurant owners and then she quickly put a plan into action. Linda got creative with her to-go menu, instituted delivery services, offered to help neighbors of Stone House Tavern with eggs, butter or even a cup of milk, if needed. She also partnered with Town of Rochester Supervisor Mike Baden to use her restaurant to prepare and deliver meals to help feed neighbors in need, as part of County Executive Pat Ryan's new Project Resilience program. Launched in mid-March, Project Resilience is a partnership program for businesses and community groups to provide food and other critical services.

Mark Guido, the owner of Front Street Tavern in Uptown Kingston, said he also is offering carry-out, curbside pickup and delivery in the greater Kingston area. He has further introduced a complete online ordering option to make it easier for patrons.

In addition, Guido has come up with a special family-style menu featuring comfort foods like roast turkey and fried chicken dinners with all the fixings.

Right now, Guido's thoughts are with his employees. Like other restaurant owners, he has been forced to cut back staff and hours, a difficult decision given the uncertainty of when things will return to normal.

"We're doing what we can," Guido said. "We're down to about five people, and they've been rotating hours. All of them know their jobs are safe. Everybody can come back when this is over. Thank God we're in a position where we'll probably get through this. The main thing right now is everybody's health and safety."

Annie Bruhn Demosthenes, the owner of Santa Fe in Uptown Kingston, couldn't be more grateful for the community's continued patronage. Like others on the local food scene, she has been forced to reinvent the restaurant during the pandemic.

"We've always offered take-out service, and on any given day, we've always had some orders, but this is unchartered territory for us. We've been blessed thus far. We have great customers, who are doing their best to support us in any way they can."

Demosthenes, meanwhile, is being creative with special pricing and keeping the restaurant's themed offerings like "Taco Tuesday" and "Wing Wednesday" going.

"A lot of people continue enjoying Taco Tuesday from their homes. We're offering single tacos at just \$5 a piece, and we're also offering discounted margaritas. Never before have restaurants been able to offer beer, wine and cocktails to-go, and it's helping us tremendously," she said.

Demosthenes also noted that customers are helping out in other ways like buying gift cards, sending encouraging texts and plugging the restaurant on social media such as the Chamber's new 'Ulster Eateries United' Facebook Group.

"As a teacher, I'm not a huge fan of social media, but many people are using it as a tool to promote their favorite restaurants and local small businesses. Santa Fe is getting tagged left and right with people showing photos of their take-out orders and saying really nice things, so that's been great."

"It's heartwarming to see our guests showing support for us. It's heartwarming to see all the restaurants showing support for each other. Some have closed, and they're steering people to the restaurants that remain open for take-out and delivery, which is so kind. We'll get through this. We just have to be there for one another and pray for the best."









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Independent Agency Gives You Choices

Richard Siegel, the founder and president of the RSS Insurance Agency in Kingston, says working with a full-service, independent agency is a whole different experience than what most people are used to when it comes to insurance.

"Some people surrender choice without knowing it because they don't choose an independent agent," says a video on the company website (www.rssagency.com). "Some insurance agents work for only one company so they can't offer you a choice of brands and policies, but independent agents aren't held captive by one company. They're free to tailor solutions to fit you, your needs, your life, to make the choices that are right for you."

That's exactly what happens at RSS Insurance Agency, which was founded in March 2013 by Siegel.

"Our staff meets the needs of clients on an individual basis and are readily available in any instance," Siegel says. "When someone is on the side of the road with a flat tire or because of an accident, they know they can call us, and we'll help guide them through a stressful time and ensure they are taken care of like family."

The company specializes in personal and commercial insurance and employee benefits.

The personal offerings include life, auto, special dwelling, motorcycle, boat, umbrella, homeowners, flood, condo, renters, ATV & Powersports, recreational vehicle, health and disability insurance. The commercial choices are insurance for business, contractors, workers comp, bonds, business property, commercial auto, general liability, umbrella, golf course and country club coverage, professional liability, cyber liability, restaurants and commercial trucks.

Siegel said his staff consists of certified New York State insurance brokers who are also credentialed in health care reform.

"We are trusted by hundreds of individuals and business owners to ensure they are getting the best rates and coverage to fit their needs," Siegel said.

"RSS strives for clients to feel like they truly matter, which is why we target quality over quantity. We believe it is a privilege to serve our valued clients. The long-standing, professional relationships that have been built are an important part of who we are and a prime example of how we operate at RSS."

Siegel said the majority of RSS Insurance's new business clients come from the testimony of other satisfied customers.



"The majority of business we have at RSS comes from word of mouth and referrals from our current clients," he said. "We all know the most trusted recommendations come from our friends and families, so we feel we are always moving in the right direction when potential clients come in because we were highly recommended to them"

RSS Insurance's online reviews include such comments as:

- "Couldn't be happier to have switched to RSS Agency. The best insurance company around. Amazing customer service makes them top notch."
- "As an owner of multiple companies and multiple vehicles, RSS has always gone above and beyond to not only make sure I have the proper coverage limits, but also continue to provide the lowest price around."
- "Knowledgeable, trusted staff who work side by side with you to get the best rates

and coverage for your needs. You won't be disappointed."

Siegel said the Chamber has also been helpful and called being a member "an uplifting experience."

"Attending mixers are perfect networking opportunities and celebrating ribbon cuttings are exciting and bring a huge sense of camaraderie among businesses," Siegel said. "The staff who run the Chamber have the most welcoming and helpful presence.

"The benefits of being a member should outweigh any doubt one would have about joining. It's a great way to shine some light on your business, whether you've been around for 30 years or just starting out."

RSS Insurance Agency, located at 380 Washington Ave. in Kingston, can be reached at (845) 481-4036 or www.rssagency.com.

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"The Chamber has helped immensely over my 50 years, including helping obtain health insurance for my employees and mailing lists for an open house. In general, they just support small businesses in the county, and we find it very beneficial"

> Chasin & Guarente Optometrists Dr. Milt Chasin



'A Champion of Local Business'

Chamber Praised For Efforts To Help During Pandemic

As the coronavirus outbreak took an immediate toll on many area businesses in March, the Chamber worked diligently on behalf of its 1,000-plus members to support

That included a multi-pronged effort like the March 17 zoom conference call on COVID-19 with Ulster County Executive Pat Ryan, as well as encouraging the public to buy gift cards from restaurants and retailers. The Chamber also pointed member businesses to national. state and county resources.

Local businesses praised the Chamber for helping those most affected weather the storm.

"The Chamber is such an authentic champion of local business," said Peter Hutchings of Spa 21 in Kingston. "This is our first year, and they have made us feel so incredibly welcomed. It is a very challenging time for everyone, and the Chamber is showing real leadership.

"They've put some initiatives in place for their members like the recent conference call (with Ryan) that was very helpful. I know they're completely inundated, but I definitely plan on asking them for more ideas and help. Knowing they're a support system and how eager they are to help makes us and everyone else feel like we're in good hands in this very chaotic moment, where the future is so unclear."

Others like Samantha Sapienza of All That JAVA in Lake Katrine said that while the Chamber's leadership is especially important now, the organization is always there for its

"They have been tremendous," she said. "I cannot say enough good about how they support their members. [Chamber President] Ward [Todd] and his team have supported us from day one and continue to do so now."

Area restaurants, among the most hardhit during the pandemic, have turned to the Chamber for innovative ideas on drumming up business.

On March 16, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that all restaurants and bars in the state must close to the public as a way to fight the spread of the coronavirus. They were allowed to continue selling take-out during the mandatory restrictions.

Cecilia Savona, whose family operates several restaurants in Ulster County and two in Dutchess, said the Chamber is like a cheerleader in this tenuous time.

"They're always uplifting and encouraging to all their members, and they keep us in touch with each other," she said. "They're also a great source of information. Obviously, we've never seen a time like this before, and I believe the Chamber will be more important than ever."

Don and Judy Tallerman, the owners of the Senate Garage, an industrial event space in Uptown Kingston, likewise applauded the Chamber for standing by the business community.

"Many of us were shuttered, and it was all so extremely new to us," said Don Tallerman. "But the Chamber is always there to support the local businesses woven into this community."

Judy Tallerman added that she appreciates all the extra efforts of Todd and the Chamber

"This, of course, has never happened before, so it was nice to know that we are part of an organization that is providing support and will continue providing support to our local businesses," she said.

On top of everything, the Chamber has offered to help in other ways, according to Christine Hein, the executive director of People's Place in Kingston.

When schools in the county closed in mid-March, the issue of feeding students who rely on free- or reduced-price school meals became a real concern. In response, People's Place immediately launched the Bag Student Hunger program.

Hein said she has been working 13-hour shifts to keep

up, and in just three days, served more than 225 families relying on the Bag Student Hunger.

She said the Chamber employees' gesture to volunteer showed just how big their hearts are.

"They're a great team," she said. "It really meant a lot."











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ULSTER YOUTHBUILD, LLC

2 Main Street - Box 5 Kingston, NY 12401

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YouthBuild Coalition

Category: Non-Profit Organizations

Ulster YouthBuild, LLC Kingston Description: Area YouthBuild is a comprehensive job training, educational, leadership development, and community development program for out-of-school low income young adults between the ages of 16 to 24. The program serves eligible young people in Kingston, NY and surrounding Ulster County locations. Participants receive compassionate interaction from a very supportive staff throughout each program component and it is this camaraderie that allows Ulster YouthBuild students to work on rebuilding their lives, and to move forward in their lives in a more positive direction.

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