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GPRC Survey Results Comments

April 7, 2020

We have had 71 responses to our survey so far. It was sent out to all GPRC members on March 17, 5 days after the GPRC made the difficult decision to postpone our 2020 State of the Region Address and cancel all future events until further notice.

Since this postponement, we have seen many of our members have to close their store fronts. Initially, businesses were directing non-essential employees to work from home, leaving store managers and owners to care for the business. Later, when the provincial government mandated non-essential businesses close their doors, our members implemented creative and innovative ways to serve their customers.

Subsequently, retail businesses are offering virtual shopping experiences, and many have created new e-commerce stores. Our dine-in restaurants have converted to take-out and delivery service.

Businesses have teamed up to provide grocery shopping services to those in need. It's remarkable to see how many businesses have come together to support each other during these challenging times. Some businesses are accompanying deliveries with a gift card for another local business, and even creating gift baskets with items from a few businesses.

79% of the respondents provided specific examples of how they're supporting their community. Some are donating to the Parkland Food Bank; others are focusing on supporting local producers. Some businesses are experiencing extreme hardships and are unable to help the community at this time but are hopeful they will do so in the future.

97% of the respondents said that their business was affected by COVID-19 with 84% reporting a decrease in revenues. When asked how long they expect to deal with the impacts of COVID-19, 53% of the respondents anticipate they will see the effects for 6 months or more, with many stating it will probably be longer.

From the Chamber's perspective, we know that each of the businesses in our region will be looking to us for recommendations about what to do. Understanding that each business is in a unique situation, the GPRC is providing necessary resources to help businesses sustain and recover from this downturn.

We asked respondents what the government can do to support businesses during the COVID-19 outbreak, and over 67% of businesses said that enhanced EI access or wage subsidy replacement for employees would help. We know that access to EI was made easier and that the CERB was introduced for those who have been temporarily laid off. However, some businesses are in need of immediate assistance such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, but they cannot wait the required weeks to receive the subsidy. From our Edmonton Chamber partners, we understand that many of their member businesses lack the liquidity to make their next payroll. It is highly likely that many of the businesses in the greater Parkland region would be in the same position.

The Chamber has been on many conference and video calls in the past weeks and we are working with our municipal counterparts and provincial government to advocate for immediate assistance and answers to the questions about the subsidy announcements. We realize that much of this is uncharted territory and that at every level, we are reacting to the numerous on-going changes. We are committed to obtaining the pertinent information for our members and will continue to advocate on their behalf.

This pandemic has tested our resilience and determination and brought our community closer together to weather the storm. With a pioneering spirit and collaboration, we are confident that we will rebound and be stronger together.

Take care and be safe,

Richard Wong, Chairman

Greater Parkland Regional Chamber of Commerce

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