



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FAYETTE COUNTY 'PLACES' BACK IN BUSINESS**

**Uniontown, PA** – Following a lengthy shutdown due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, countless Pennsylvania communities are heading back to work.

For the last few months, restaurants were limited to delivery and takeout options; stores have put social distancing and mask requirements in place; countless businesses limited staff, cut hours and moved to appointment-only services; and many recreational and personal care facilities paused operations completely.

Upon entering the “green phase” of Gov. Tom Wolf’s reopening plan earlier this month, Fayette County’s small businesses returned with increased safety measures in place to protect both employees and patrons.

For their efforts in helping to mitigate the spread of COVID-19; resilience in times of uncertainty; and determination to return to a sense of normalcy, Fayette County’s small business community has been chosen as the latest “Place” in the Fayette County Public Relations Initiative’s ongoing “Faces and Places” series. The series aims to highlight the many citizens and locations that make Fayette County a wonderful place to live, work and do business.

Fayette Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Muriel Nuttall said COVID- 19 has led to “unprecedented” experiences throughout Fayette County.

“Who would have ever predicted a pandemic would force our small business community to shut down on such short notice?” Nuttall said. “It’s normal for our businesses to operate on a shoestring budget, so the shock of a shutdown has impacted our community in ways we could not fathom.”

During the statewide closures, the chamber rallied behind businesses, providing resources for owners and employees through various initiatives. The support will continue as safety restrictions remain in place.

“As a business organization, it’s been amazing to witness this community’s resiliency,” Nuttall said. “Having businesses step up and support each other, even when they weren’t on solid ground themselves, that’s what makes Fayette County great.”

Lucy King, owner of the Connellsville Bed and Breakfast, said local businesses are “still going through it,” and striving to create safe environments for customers.

"I do have to admit it is challenging and we definitely aren't as busy as we usually are this time of year," King said. "We have to remain so clean and make sure everything is sanitized. Our space doesn't look like it did earlier and it takes about 30 minutes longer to service each guest room, but we're using UV lights to sterilize everything."

Despite the changes, King said she believes most local business owners have adapted to their "new normal."

"At the end of the day, you just know it's what you have to do. There's no other choice, so there's no sense moaning about it. It won't last forever and, if it does, we'll be prepared for it," she said. "We just try to remember that while it affects our business, it doesn't affect everything in our lives, so we just have to buckle down and get through it. It's a setback, but it's not the end, and it helps to have people around that are supportive."

King said her regular customers are excited to see them back in business and keeping their health and safety in mind.

"People are still very cautious and they're asking about the future," she said. "For right now, we're doing just fine, and it's business as usual for the tourism industry in Fayette County."

Jacqueline's Fine Jewelry owner Tom Licciardi also called the last few months "challenging," because it's "completely changed the way we have to approach business."

"The pandemic definitely opened our eyes to being prepared for unexpected things like this in the future. Being a jewelry business, we've been able to move more into online sales, have sales on social media every night and really adapt to the circumstances," Licciardi said. "We're also very fortunate that we have great relationships with existing customers who never stopped calling. Birthdays and anniversaries didn't stop happening during the pandemic, so that helped sustain us through all of this."

Licciardi said he hopes to establish solid practices by the holiday season, which is typically his busiest time of year.

"I think there's still going to be a lot of people who are very reluctant, no matter what kind of business they're going into. We've learned to do the best we can, which I think is true for all retail businesses," he said. "I think it's great to see how resilient Fayette County has been, especially with all the new businesses opening despite all this. I grew up in Uniontown; I'm proud of my hometown; and I hope it keeps going in the right direction."

Darnell Samuel, veteran and owner of Market Street Barbershop, said he's proud of how small businesses "made the best out of the situation" throughout the shutdown.

"Being a business owner during a pandemic is tough, but I've kept my mind in a positive place. Even though there's still rules and regulations we have to follow, I was able to use my time away wisely and reevaluate some of my business practices," Samuel said. "We're now able to take in customers in multiple ways; we upgraded our website and search options; and we've made ourselves more visible to even more people. I really took a look at how to streamline operations in multiple ways, so it's worked out for the better for me."

Samuel said the small business community has helped him from the very beginning, and they've all worked together to find the "silver lining" of this unprecedented event.

"Here in Brownsville, we all know and support each other. We send our customers to other businesses in town and we've shown our love throughout this whole thing. Only the strong survive when you're facing something like this, so it's good to be an example to others," he said. "I'm a 20-year U.S. Air Force retiree. I've been in some of the most dangerous places in the world and led people through those things, so I'm very thankful that God helped me prepare for all this. I'm a more resilient business owner because of it."

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said county citizens have a long history of overcoming adversity, and "resilience in the age of COVID is no different."

"People here have a can-do spirit; the ability to look at a situation and see not a roadblock, but opportunity," Lohr said. "That's how our small businesses will survive and thrive through COVID and beyond."

Lohr said small businesses are "the backbone of Fayette County," because we all have friends and family members working in those settings.

"It's those connections that are important. These businesses rely on those connections and the goodwill that's generated by personal connections," he said. "When you support small business, it becomes personal, because you're helping your family; your friends; your neighbors; people you know and care about."

Commissioner Vince Vicites said Fayette County businesses are among the strongest and most resilient in the country.

"This year has been tough on our small businesses, but they're as determined as ever to succeed and thrive," Vicites said. "Their drive is unmatched, and I have no doubt they'll continue to adapt and evolve as new challenges come their way."

Vicites praised local business owners for all their hard work in not only reopening, but doing so as safely as possible.

"Fayette County is all about neighbors helping neighbors, so it's no surprise our citizens have rallied behind our small businesses. In return, our businesses have gone to great lengths to establish safety measures, such as social distancing and mask protocols, and woven them seamlessly into their operations," he said. "Their extraordinary efforts and willingness to make sacrifices is what sets our Fayette County businesses apart. For that, we should celebrate and support them through these difficult times."

Commissioner Scott Dunn said Fayette County's independent, small business owners have displayed unbelievable strength and fortitude.

"It truly amazes me. These people are spending their life savings, retirement funds or going further in debt to try to keep their doors open and employees working during this pandemic," Dunn said. "All the while, many still find the resources and energy to give to others who are also in need. I've said it before - small business is the backbone of Fayette County."

Dunn said it's devastating to see businesses that aren't able to reopen right now, and may never be able to reopen in the future.

"These are the people that continuously sponsor ball teams, school and community activities, animal shelters, disaster relief and more," he said. "This is our opportunity to step up and continue supporting them. I'm very proud to say Fayette County residents have risen to the challenge and done just that during this COVID-19 pandemic."

The Connellsville Bed and Breakfast is located at 316 West Crawford Avenue in Connellsville. To learn more, visit <https://www.connellsvillebedbreakfast.com/about>.

Jacqueline's Fine Jewelry is located at 30 South Mt. Vernon Avenue in Uniontown. To learn more, visit <https://www.jacquelinesfinejewelry.com/>.

Market Street Barbershop is located at 410 Market Street in Brownsville. To learn more, visit <https://marketstreetbarbershop.business.site/>.

For more information about Fayette County's thriving business community, call the Fayette Chamber of Commerce at 724-437-4571 or visit [www.Facebook.com/FayCham](http://www.Facebook.com/FayCham).

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org).

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For more information, contact Kristi Rooker Kassimer, Public Relations Specialist, at 412-691-0262, [kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info](mailto:kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info) or Kaylie Moore, Journalist, at 724-317-6924, [kmoore@fayettecountypa.info](mailto:kmoore@fayettecountypa.info).