

## How is Downtown Kinston Adjusting to the New Normal?

It seems that Lenoir County historically receives more than its fair share of lemons. We have learned to make lemonade and serve it cold and sweet. We are every bit as worried about the current situation as everyone else, but we are trying to have fun with it, too, because, well, why not?

Normal has shifted for all of us, but as community leaders it is important for us to be positive in the face of fear and uncertainty. We also need to recognize the economic consequences that are rippling throughout our communities as a result of the virus and make the most of opportunities during gloomy times.

Our food industries and social locations are being hit hard first. However, we must remember the economic impact is more far-reaching than just the owner and staff of a restaurant. USA restaurants employ over 15.1 million people compared to the cruise companies' 250,000. That is only two of many industries related to just our revitalization, tourism, community economic development, and planning work.

Think about all of the suppliers and support industries and their employees. If we factor in where some products originate, this is potentially a global economic tsunami. It seems almost everything is grinding to a halt. In underdeveloped countries, NPR reported that there are predictions of food shortages and in some areas riots have broken out. This is scary stuff, but we will get through it.



To help mitigate the impact here in Kinston and the encourage business downtown primarily, but also throughout the city, we have collectively mounted a strong support local business social media campaign and my office with our social media team, Magic Mile Media / Neuse News, began shooting video clips of all of our restaurants downtown showing how they are adapting to serve customers and keep their doors open since the dining rooms are now closed. The of series was posted on our Pride of Kinston FB page.

Overall, the atmosphere is positive though tempered with strength for endurance. Owners explain in the videos about their to-go processes for delivering to the curb, home, and shipping as well as shared all of their contact and ordering options. They also invited the viewers to like and follow their social media pages for updates as things continue to evolve for each of them. We plan to produce similar videos for our retailers. It is exciting, too, to see the businesses begin to use more social media to promote their business.

Here are some examples from this week. Whiskey Pig butcher shop/restaurant/deli spoke with me the other evening and after I reviewed her on-line store page for meats, accepted my constructive criticism to recreate it, post sexy photos of her beautiful grass-fed meats to draw people in and make their mouths water, simplify the ordering process, and put it out there on social media with some boost dollars behind it, and do it immediately. She has had to take one of her farm's cows to slaughter along with some sheep because all week she has been selling and shipping her product as far away as Maine. Another customer ordered enough to stock their freezer for the summer. Consequently, she is now hustling to replenish.

Another restaurant owner studied the executive order for closing dining rooms. He met with the health department to discuss alternatives. They determined that while to-go is the directive with the dining rooms being closed, it did not prohibit limited, appropriately spaced outdoor seating. Others are following suit . . .for now.

Business was brisk as the outdoor seating attracted other customers. Outdoor seating allows people to linger downtown and possibly do some business elsewhere rather than hopping back in the car to return home to self-imposed isolation. It also energizes our sidewalk dining opportunity that has been slow to take hold.

Free delivery within a 5 mile radius is available from another restaurant with a minimum order of \$25 **PLUS** includes your choice from two of their most popular appetizers **PLUS** includes a gift card toward the next order.



**WeReport NeuseNews.com**  
Yesterday at 6:47 PM · 🌐

From Piggy Wiggly

Good evening everyone just an update. We were unable to get trucks today but will be receiving them tomorrow in this area. Once trucks have been unloaded and the employee start restocking I will take pictures and notify here on the site of the locations here in Kinston and what they got that way you can know when it's out and what is there at what location. Please keep an eye out here on this site and I will let y'all know as soon as the trucks arrive and are unloaded. You can also check our Facebook page Piggy Wiggly stores for updated information as well. Thank you all for your patience we are all in this together have a wonderful evening.

After posting our videos yesterday, another merchant was flooded with orders and spent the evening delivering their pre-prepared refrigerated family meals. Another will deliver out of town in the area where she lives.

One retailer commented that she has been surprisingly busy.

Kinston is very much a social media town. All local chat pages are blowing up promoting support for local businesses with constant shares along with posting updates about availability of other items around town as well as some humorous guilt posts. Also, some of the grocery stores have jumped on board to post when trucks will be arriving with items to restock the shelves.



We must all be super pro-active through this. We are positive forces in our community. Out-of-the-box creative thinking is what we should be exploring along with upping our social media games. It is a matter of survival. It's free, it's easy, and it's fun. Every merchant should be liking, following, and sharing their neighbors' pages in the spirit of commUNITY. People are sick of the sick news. They want some amusement. They spending more time on social media. It is a captive audience and it is free. Videos, like this one hilarious post from Capps Trailers, get more attention than dull still shots, just so you know.

**Here's your sign.....**

**Remember all the businesses that you've asked for years and years to donate to your clubs, events, and organizations? They're calling in a favor.**

Kinston is known for music. With events being cancelled, musicians are being hit, too. Clever ones are taking to live streaming performances with PayPal tip buttons. It is great social distancing plus they earn a few bucks.



Bump up your social media presence, be well, and have fun. Now wash your hands.

Leon Steele, executive director, Pride of Kinston Downtown Revitalization