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TOPICAL URGENT

Crown Point business owners share uplifting message amid coronavirus closures

Mary Freda
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CROWN POINT — It's usually tough to find a parking spot around the downtown square on any given day.

However, various spaces sat vacant Tuesday and window displays dark as small businesses closed their doors to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Among the dark display windows donning signs that let patrons know the closures are temporary, some businesses are choosing to display another message.

"It's going to be okay," a large white poster with red hearts read from the storefront window at Blue Pear Mercantile, 106 W. Clark St.

Owner Robert Radzinski said he typically changes the window display once a month. After closing a week ago, he was left to think about the projects that needed to get done around the shop, including changing out the window display.

"I thought rather than putting just traditional merchandise in there like I would, I just put a big sign with something positive," Radzinski said.

📄 UPDATE: Franciscan Health confirms 4 new Lake County coronavirus cases

The trend didn't stop at his Clark Street store. Businesses along the square, including Sip Coffee House, Cafe Fresco and After8 Handmade Awesomeness have posted signs, too.



A sign in the window of After8 Handmade Awesomeness reads, "Farther apart, but in it together." The store at 104 N. Main St. is currently closed to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Mary Freda

The downtown area, which is usually "hopping," has been quiet recently, said Radzinski, who also lives on the square.


"I thought it'd actually be kind of cool if all the businesses put signs (up), and then people, when they do venture out and they need to just get some fresh air and take a drive, to come down here so that they could still see something positive rather than empty spots," he said.

To help achieve that goal, Radzinski called Sip Coffee House owner Rhonda Bloch, who later posted a sign that reads, "This too shall pass," in one of the cafe's windows.



A sign at Sip Coffee House, 11 N. Court St., reads "This too shall pass." The shop remains open for to-go and carryout orders.

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 Porter County Council delays Tuesday meeting, plans livestream in COVID-19 response

Bloch said she has heard mixed reviews about the cafe's decision to say open for carryout orders. However, to her knowledge, many have chosen to take the same route.

At this time, the Crown Point and Highland locations are open from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., and all food orders are being made from scratch, Bloch said.

Jamie Bruinsma, who owns After8, said she took a cue from Blue Pear and posted a sign in her window, too.

The sign, "Farther apart, but in it together," was made by her husband, Kevin.

"There's so many people driving through the square every day, and ... we can spread a little positivity," Bruinsma said.

Volunteers sew masks for health workers facing shortages

Bruinsma said After8 closed Saturday, but she continues to work from home, offering porch pickups. Currently, she is making masks that would be beneficial for the general public.

The masks are \$3 each, and should not be used by people who are on the front lines of dealing with the coronavirus, as it is not made of the same fabric as the N95 mask, Bruinsma said.

A changing landscape

Radzinski, who owned Blue Pear for nine years, closed the store's doors indefinitely March 17 to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. On Monday, he began to post items for sale on the shop's Instagram page for the first time.

However, following Gov. Eric Holcomb's stay-at-home order in effect until April 7, Radzinski said he's not sure if customers still will be able to pick up orders.

"It changes day by day," he said. "It definitely goes back and forth. There's some times I'm super optimistic, and then there's other times where it just seems like there's no answer."

"Overall, I'm not as stressed as I would have thought I'd be, and I think that's because we're all in the same boat. I don't feel like it's happening to me. I just feel like this is something that we all have to deal with."

Indiana governor orders Hoosiers to stay home until April 7, except for essential needs

Owner of Lelulo's Sarah Metzger said she's currently the only one working at the vegan eatery because of the pandemic.

"So far our regular customers are still showing their support, so that's super awesome to still have those people coming through. It's certainly slower," she said.

"It's really just a day-by-day uncertainty."

Toula Klideris, owner of Prime Steakhouse and Umi Sushi and Lounge on the square, was picking up to-go containers to bring to AVGO and Chop House on Wicker in St. John, which she also owns.

"I can't believe this is happening. I never thought I'd see this in my lifetime," Klideris said. "I'm very sad to not be open and see all of our guests that come in on a daily basis. I'm here every day and now last Monday we had to shut down. I hope that we open soon."

Klideris said they couldn't keep all four restaurants open, however, AVGO and Chop House are open and offering carryout orders and curbside pickup.

"I want to open. I want to get back to normal," she said.

Spreading the love

Owner of Cafe Fresco and President of Community Love Breanne Zolfo was at her cafe on Tuesday, helping sort food and hygiene products for anyone who needs it.

The cafe — which is still offering delivery — has turned into a food pantry.



Justine Kurylo sorts food into bins at Cafe Fresco on Tuesday. The cafe has turned into a pantry, offering food and hygiene items for those who need it.

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"We've been using this as a time to give back to the community and help support the people that are around here while they're going through a difficult time," Zolfo said.

Zolfo added from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesday she will be at 13350 Lincoln Plaza Way in Cedar Lake handing out donations for anyone who may need it.

She, too, has a sign in her window. It reads: "We're all in this together."



A sign in the window of Cafe Fresco, 1 N. Court St., reads "We're all in this together." Crown Point business owners have been sharing uplifting message amid coronavirus closures.

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"Blue Pear started it, and then we all just have been putting signs in our window to inspire people or motivate them or encourage them, just as a way in these hard times for people to know we're all in this together," she said. "This is the most important time for people to work together, now more than ever."

Gallery: COVID-19 infects NWI; Region reacts

Blood donations at Community Healthcare System