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LOCAL TASK FORCE ORGANIZES DONOR CAMPAIGN TO HELP SMALL BUSINESS

The Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Hazleton Alliance are working with the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership and other members of the Greater Hazleton COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency (R&R) Task Force to establish the Small Business Emergency Relief Microgrant Program.

This is a crowdfunded donor campaign with a goal of raising \$75,000 from local individuals, families, loyal customers, and other private corporations. This approach taps into the collective support of a large pool of donors—with opportunities for donations to be made via online platforms.

All funds raised will be dedicated towards a MicroGrant program for local, small businesses within the Greater Hazleton Area that have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant funds (ranging from \$500 to \$1,500) will be able to be used to offset any business-related expense, such as: employee wages and benefits (such as health insurance), rent, utilities, and/or business insurance, as well as new investments in a website, e-commerce platform, a delivery service, or necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) purchases, such as masks for employees, plexiglass screens for registers, etc.

Anyone interested in donating to the campaign can do so online via the website:

<https://www.patronicity.com/hazletonsmallbusiness>, or by sending a check directly to the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership at 8 W. Broad St., Suite M-1490, Hazleton PA, 18201. A printable pledge form is available on the Alliance's website: www.downtownhazleton.org. All donations are tax-deductable.

The campaign has already raised more than a quarter of its fund goal from several lead corporate donors, including Cargill Meat Solutions, **Mericle Commercial Real Estate Services**, **Lehigh Valley Health Network-Hazleton**, the Hazleton Standard Speaker, and the Hazleton Rotary Club. Remaining funds, it is hoped, will come from additional industries, as well as local citizens and supporters of small business.



The MicroGrant program guidelines are under development, and applications will start being accepted on May 18th, with at least two grant rounds being awarded. The number and size of the grants will depend upon the amount of funds raised.

GREATER HAZLETON SMALL BUSINESS COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY RESULTS

The need for the MicroGrant program stems from an online survey conducted by the R&R Task Force that was designed to better understand local business' ability to withstand what may be several months of suppressed revenue and what kinds of support initiatives and recovery programs may have the most impact.

The 25-question survey was open from April 20 to April 30, 2020. Eighty small business owners (*) responded, of which 91% of respondents reported owning businesses with fewer than 20 employees, and 65% of respondents having been in business longer than 10 years. Thus, findings from this survey highlight the profound impact of the current crisis on the smallest, long-standing, locally-owned businesses that are the backbone of the Greater Hazleton community. (*) *For the purposes of the survey a Small Business was defined as those with less than 100 employees. The Greater Hazleton Area is defined by the boundaries of the Hazleton Area School District.*

Half of all respondents have laid off employees, with 30% stating that they closed their business, at least temporarily. More than 87% of those with a storefront presence have suspended their operations. More than 70% responded that their revenue has decreased by more than half of what it was prior to the pandemic.

Most significantly, nearly 69% of respondents reported that their business will be at risk of closing permanently within six months if disruptions continue at the current rate without financial assistance.

Realizing this risk, more than 78% of respondents stated that they have applied for financial assistance. Most have applied for the Small Business Administration's two widely-promoted loan programs: the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program (EIDL), and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). However, many businesses did not receive approval for these loans.

The survey finds that business owners primarily need financial assistance with their expenses (rent, mortgage, utilities), to get them through this period. They are also most concerned about losing future work, as well as customer safety, employee safety, and their employee's financial welfare.

For more information about the survey or the general questions related to the fundraising campaign, contact Mary Malone at mmalone@hazletonchamber.org or Krista Schneider at kschneider@downtownhazleton.org.

OTHER INITIATIVES

In effort to provide some relief to local businesses, the R&R Task Force members are working on the following initiatives:



- CAN BE, the Wilkes SBDC, and other partners have established a six-part online free webinar series designed to help business owners navigate web and social media development and management, as nearly 35% of survey respondents said that they do not have a website for their business. For more information contact Jocelyn Sterenchock at jsterenchock@hazletoncando.com.
- Penn State Hazleton is developing an internship program to allow its students to assist businesses without websites establish one, and the Hazleton LaunchBox is offering free online seminars for small business owners to share ideas how they are managing, pivoting, and being creative in order to sustain their business during this crisis. They are also developing entrepreneurship webinars geared towards helping new business start-ups meet the needs of the low-contact economy. For more information contact Deb Conway at dxk40@psu.edu.
- CAN DO continues to assist businesses in their pursuit of loan programs and the application process. The organization is also working with the Wilkes University SBDC to develop a webinar that will assist businesses navigate how to properly account for any loans they do receive. For more information contact Mark Minnig at mminnig@hazletoncando.com.
- The Greater Hazleton Chamber is compiling updates on local business operations, reopening guidelines, and local procurement opportunities for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). More information can be found on the Chamber's website: <https://www.hazletonchamber.org/>.
- The PA CareerLink® continues to assist job seekers and businesses. Visit their website at <https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov> or call: 570-599-2100.
- DiscoverNEPA continues to maintain a comprehensive list of state and local resources related to COVID-19 resources, and share updates intended to promote local businesses that remain open. For more information visit: <https://www.discovernepa.com>.