



March 31, 2021

March 13, 2020 was the day that changed our world. Up until then we had heard about an unusual and somewhat unknown virus in China emerging. But we live in Maine, it won't affect us here right? At Saco Main Street we had been preparing for another great year of helping our businesses and starting the planning for our spectacular events that help make Saco a great place to be. When a National State of Emergency was declared on that day in March there was so much to come that we didn't know. Masks, Social Distancing, Rapid Testing, Ventilators, Essential Workers, Asymptomatic, Community Spread, Herd Immunity and PPE. All words we may have heard of but they now became forefront in our reality and have brought new meaning.

I remember in March thinking "Well, the Sidewalk Art Festival is not until late June, that should be no problem right?" Wow what we didn't know then. So as this pandemic began to unfold our year rapidly changed. Normal activities were set aside and new ones took their place. Time to focus on the health of our local businesses, as well as, our community health. As soon as we heard about the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) we made sure our local businesses were aware of the program and knew how to apply for the support. We actually helped a few navigate the process and get the needed relief. As our restaurants appeared to be at the highest risk we were proud to see how quickly they were able to adapt to "The New Normal" and quickly pivot to take-out and curbside pickup. As the weather warmed we worked with the city to allow for additional outdoor dining options that have proved to be highly successful and allowed our eateries to continue to stay open. None of this was without sacrifice but our Saco small business community like many across the country is very tough and resilient, not willing to give up and willing to do what it takes to make it through trying times.

As to our community health, Saco came through like a champ! The Saco Parks and Rec Team's Senior Community Meal Distribution provided over 4,300 meals to our senior population for 13 weeks during the stay at home order and 5 times since. Of course none of this could have happened without the financial support of over a dozen of our generous local business and citizen contributions. The beauty of this program was that seniors were fed and eight local restaurants got much needed cash flow at a truly critical time. As we stood at the curbside pick-up every week through cold, wind, rain and heat the true community benefit showed through, seeing the sparkle in the eyes of the senior recipients thankful for the meal but even more grateful for the human contact and a reason to get out of the house. The same was said by the volunteers from the Parks and Rec staff and the Saco Police Department that delivered meals to those who couldn't get out. They say you can't see smiles through a mask but I contend you can feel them.

We didn't want to have our downtown look like a pandemic so to brighten our collective spirits we continued with our Flags on Main Street and Floral Planter Program to create beauty when it was needed most. Normally we would ask for donations for these programs but under the circumstances we felt it was best for us to dig deep and make it happen. Downtown Saco was beautiful this summer and when fall came and we couldn't host the traditional Pumpkin Harvest Festival we had over 30 community created "Scarecrows on Parade". The scarecrows were decorated by businesses, church

groups, local citizens and each class at Young School! The scarecrows made our fall as festive as could be. We also hope you enjoyed the new holiday lights this year as we re-lamped all the snowflakes making them significantly brighter and added over 15,000 twinkling lights on our lamp poles to bring a new sparkle to the downtown.

Finally, I want to say how proud we are of our existing businesses powering through with everything they had and the fact that during this pandemic we have had five new businesses open including Good Times Barbershop, furniture and home accessory stores, Vintage Shabby Beach and Mia Sorella Studio, as well as, restaurants Sugar Mama's and Pacifico. On top of that we have two more businesses to come, Sweet Sunrise Bakery and Taco Trio opening in the next month!

At the end of every communication we always say "Saco...It's Happening!". I think we now have to modify that to say "Saco...It's **STILL** Happening!"

Rob Biggs
Executive Director
Saco Main Street