

## St. Charles Chamber of Commerce – Adapting Business Models During COVID-19

*By Chris Flood*

On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, Chamber President Jim Di Ciaula invited five local business leaders to participate in a panel discussion (via Zoom) focusing on challenges that COVID-19 presented to their business, and how they adapted their business model for survival and success. Participants included Dr. Connor LaVallie (Greater Good Chiropractic Care); Annette Uda (PetAirapy / Aerapy); Konnie Sherry (Norris Cultural Arts Center); Paul Lencioni, (Blue Goose Market); and Tom Schrilla (Warehouse Direct).

With Chris Flood (St. Charles Public Library) moderating, these representatives from different business categories (retail, logistics, health-care, arts, manufacturing and service) generously shared their time and expertise, demonstrating locally what the current issue of the **Harvard Business Review** featured: *Adapt Your New Business to the New Reality* (Sept-Oct 2020). The article suggests adjusting your business model to reflect behavioral changes (implications of new trends affecting how you create and deliver value, whom you need to partner with, and who your customers should be), and using data to actively seek out anomalies and surprises.

With external marketing events canceled, Dr. LaVallie focused on providing value for his current customers, by checking on their current well-being, or following-up on previous conditions. Even if it was virtual (phone, e-mail, Zoom), connecting safely to other human beings, especially back in March and April, was important, and will continue to be.

Annette Uda explained the pivot PetAirapy did: from utilizing ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI or UV) technology to keep pets safe from disease (kennel cough, canine influenza), they rebranded and became Aerapy, offering this service for people (in care facilities, residences, etc.). Creating healthy indoor

environments is important for pets, but also now critically important for people. A pet-to-people pivot, if you will.

The Norris Cultural Arts Center faced performance cancellations, but they adapted and were able to begin hosting programs again, beginning with a concert at the Baker Community Center during the St. Charles Jazz Weekend. Adaptations included socially distanced seating at tables, eliminating intermission, and drink delivery to tables, to avoid congregating at the bar. More programs and new exhibits at the Norris Gallery are planned for the future.

The Blue Goose began their delivery and pick-up service in January of this year, averaging 30 orders per day, initially. In March this exploded to 250 daily orders, with the logistics of sourcing products, maintaining inventory, and sorting orders overwhelming day-to-day operations. Employees were redeployed—bartenders to drivers, and more. Lencioni believes that marketing is the reveal of a company's internal culture, and the Blue Goose demonstrated their commitment and care by providing what we all needed: food, wine, a safe store, delivery, and of course, toilet paper.

Logistics are also covered in the current **Harvard Business Review**, in the article *"Global Supply Chains in a Post-Pandemic World."* Warehouse Direct's Schrilla faced a new supply chain world—crazy demand for previously low-demand items, such as Plexiglas dividers, and no demand for other items as workplaces moved to personal residences. Salespeople were told to stop talking and start listening, because when you truly listen, you can then solve problems.

The Chamber has not been spared from this adaptation-time, of course, and one manifestation is #StongerTogetherSTC, encompassing sending meals to first responders while supporting local restaurants, and supporting local non-profits. The content on their web page "Covid-19 Business Tools + Resources" is almost endless and a great tool for the community.

Other topics covered included what positive discoveries were made resulting from the pivot, which practices will be maintained in the post-COVID work world, and which audience was the biggest challenge in accepting the pivot—self, customer, staff or vendors. These topics and the rest of the program can be viewed from the link that will be available in the future from the Chamber's website.

And lastly, for a quick library commercial, the above-mentioned September-October 2020 edition of the **Harvard Business Review** can be read during a visit to the library (in the temporary location at the former Haines Middle School), or accessed online using your St. Charles Public Library card via the Business Source Premier database.