

**BUSINESS, NEWS**

## AG AND EDIC SPELL RELIEF FOR LYNN BUSINESSES

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | August 26, 2020



LYNN — Business has been steady lately for Uncommon Feasts, but the pandemic continues to bring uncertainty to the coming months, which is why owner Michelle Mulford is grateful for the recent boost she received from the city.

That boost is a \$2,500 grant Mulford received from the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn).

EDIC/Lynn has been able to award that same amount to 17 other small businesses in the city that have been battered by the coronavirus, thanks to a \$45,000 grant Lynn received from Attorney General Maura Healey's office. Fifteen of the 18 businesses awarded funding are minority- or female-owned.

"I'm grateful for it," said Mulford. "It's helping us prepare for the fall, what the fall and winter is going to bring. It gives a little bit of a buffer. I am, as usual, grateful for the EDIC for pulling it all together."

Mulford said once the weather gets bad, she will be able to hold small private events in the restaurant, but won't be opening it for indoor dining. Only takeout, delivery, and the restaurant's new retail and prepared food component will continue to be offered, she said.

The Attorney General's Small Business Relief Partnership Grant Program has provided funding to municipalities and regional planning agencies that are assisting small businesses in the communities they serve.

Grant funds are being distributed to help small businesses address fixed debt, payroll, accounts payable, lost sales, lost opportunities, and other working capital expenses incurred from the pandemic.

The \$2,500 grants distributed by the city and EDIC/Lynn were targeted to businesses that have been affected by the virus, and that have no more than 25 employees, including the owner.

The business owner's household income could not be more than 80 percent of the area median income, at least one employee had to have been in jeopardy of losing his/her job and the business committed to retaining that employee, or one job was retained by or created for a low- to moderate-income employee.

"The AG's Small Business Relief Partnership Grant Program will bring some additional relief to the small businesses in the city as they try to survive the adverse impact of this pandemic," said Mayor Thomas M. McGee.

"I want to thank Attorney General Maura Healey for awarding the city a grant to help these small businesses that are hurting as we work to rebuild the economy and help them stay afloat."

EDIC/Lynn Executive Director James Cowdell added, "these grants will have a dramatic effect on businesses and are definitely much needed and appreciated."

For Sarah Marshall, having to deal with a pandemic was the last thing she expected when she opened her new business, Lucille Wine Shop & Tasting Room, last February, six weeks before the shutdown.

"It was a very challenging start," said Marshall. "Fortunately, I don't have a normal, so in some ways a new business is you're learning as you go regardless. I only know how to run a business in COVID. We were fortunate. I was able to pivot really quickly."

After reopening, Marshall said she was still not able to use the tasting room, which is a large part of their business model. Two to three weeks into the shutdown, she said they were able to pivot to getting the store's online ordering system up and running.

An unexpected benefit of the restrictions is she has been able to focus on mastering a couple of different business models, rather than learning them all at once.

Still, it's been a difficult first year and Marshall said she is grateful for some relief.

“We cannot be more excited and appreciative,” she said. “Opening this year has been challenging, so this is very helpful. A little bit goes a long way.”

Marshall plans to use the grant funds for payroll so she can hire more staff to make up for the two layoffs she was forced to make earlier this year. Those two layoffs accounted for two-thirds of her staff, she said.

“For a while I was just operating by myself,” said Marshall. “I’ve been able to hire back one person part-time and now I’m looking for two to three people part-time in addition. We’re going into our busiest season, the fall season. Business is picking up and we need the help.”

James Appleton, owner of Roland L. Appleton, Inc., is all too familiar with the strain small businesses have been feeling from the virus.

It’s hard for a company that plans large-scale events to make much of a profit when the majority of those events have been canceled because of limits on large gatherings.

“Being in the big event business, we’ve lost all kinds of stuff so it really is a godsend,” Appleton said of the grant. “We’ve canceled well over \$1 million worth of business. We usually do about 45 graduations a year. This year we did four.”

Appleton said he plans to use the funds to pay bills, including health insurance premiums for his employees. He recently had to lay off two employees in the company’s laundry room due to low volume, but other than that, he has been able to retain the rest of his staff.

However, things seem to be looking up for the event rentals company. Business has been picking up lately, Appleton said, explaining that restaurants and medical companies on the North Shore have been using their tents for outdoor dining and coronavirus respectively.

“We’re seeing an improvement,” said Appleton. “We’re definitely seeing an uptick in business. The lights are still on. We’re still paying the bills.”

In addition to Lynn, 12 other communities were awarded funding from the AG’s office, including Revere.

“Our small businesses have suffered greatly by the financial crisis caused by this pandemic,” said Healey. “We hope that this funding provides some relief as we work together to rebuild our economy.”



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