

Lewiston (cont.)

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Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought Lewiston – you know me, I’ve always said it’s magical – but my God, people came out. ... I’ve never seen such a commitment to people shopping small and supporting. It was unbelievable – it continues. It still continues.”

She explained, “It was the hardest of times, but it’s been the best lessons I’ve ever learned in my life. I wouldn’t have learned these lessons without this. I could have done without it (laughs), but at the same point, I value the lessons I’ve learned. I know I don’t want to not be at that shop. Like, if I had any doubts before, they’re gone, 100%.”

Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce President Jennifer Pauly said, “One year ago, almost all of our members had to immediately change the course of their business model. The word ‘pivot’ was used a lot in conversations over the course of the pandemic to help them figure out ways to retain revenue and keep the lights on. We are amazed at how seamless everyone was able to work together to help each other out – the businesses, municipalities, civic organizations and first responders.

“Unfortunately, some businesses are unable to bounce back from the pandemic, but we have seen many who have found new avenues to grow their businesses and others who are doing better than ever.”

These business owners are optimistic about what 2021 could bring, but prepared to roll with any future COVID-19 punches.

“Hope is the word; absolutely, I feel hopeful,” Pignatora said. “A lot of us were saying last year we just don’t know what to expect, because we have no other year to compare this to. We said that in 2020 – and I feel the same about 2021 – I’m up for the challenge. I don’t know what it’s going to be. ... I don’t know what it’s going to be like, but I know we’re going to be fine. That’s how I feel.”

“This is just the year of hard work. We got a lot of work to do, as a society, to get us to a better place. We were divided; we need to work and get back together; we need to stay together as a community and rebuild; and I think it’s gonna take us a couple of years to get out of all this, truly. I don’t know what 2021 spring, summer (will be). I’m hopeful, but I’m ready for it. ... God-dang, if I can make it through last year, I’ll make it through this year, too. I’m up for it.”

Soldano said, “We’re ready to hit the ground running; and we’re excited to be a part of all the festivals again – and do it in whatever style it’s going to be; if people are going to be wearing masks or whatever, any part of that.”

He added, “It’s actually going to be a nice little distraction for me and my family to stay busy and to see our work staff work more than three, four days, back to their normal five days, so they could have money in their pockets and, you know, go back full circle to the swing of things with their lives and the restaurant, and just having some kind of normalcy.”

Fiore said, “I can tell you, our weekends in the summer are booking so fast; it’s amazing.”

“I just can’t wait to see the people again – the people that we haven’t seen in a while with all the restrictions in place,” he said.

SHOP AND DINE LOCALLY:

- Casa Antica, 490 Center St.
- Inspirations on Canvas, 449 Center St.
- Village Bake Shoppe, 417 Center St.
- Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, 895 Center St.

“We’re in the people business, and we happen to sell dessert. So, I’m just excited to see (them). ...

“Having a business in Lewiston, and living in Lewiston, we live in the greatest part of the world, in my opinion. So, to be able to see the people that you normally see in passing or, you know, that are not even customers, but you just see these people more – it just brings so much more joy.

“With that, too, we’re excited, because we’ve been coming up with new and innovative desserts, and we have so much in the pipeline to share with the community.”

“We’re just excited to be the desert destination of Niagara County,” Fiore said.

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