

Small Business Saturday: Celebrating homegrown merchants

Continued from Page 1

"We sold more vegetable seeds and flower seeds this year than we probably have in the last five. And then that meant that garden tools went during the summer, and potting soil. That was another element; grilling was another area that perked up this year, too. People were staying home; they weren't going out. Every department was touched. The biggest increase we saw was in the paint area, though."

Though there were less activities in Lewiston over the warmer months, "We did see an increase in customer count, because I don't think people initially wanted to go into the larger stores and be exposed to hundreds of people, if you will," Warren said. "So that, I think, did help us. We've heard a lot more people talking about shopping local, which is great."

"We've gotten some new regulars," said Bill's daughter, Ashley Warren.

COVID-19 concerns notwithstanding, Warren's clientele keeps coming back because "It boils down to service," he said. "They can come in and talk to

us, and we can solve problems quickly, get them on their way. We have the same products – we don't have the same depth, if you will, that 'big box' stores do, but I would say 85% of what a homeowner needs, 90%, we have. And we've done it. I mean, everything that we talk about we've done in our own homes over the years, and so we can speak from experience – not just book readings. It's service and convenience. We're here, and we monitor our pricing. That's one thing I really keep an eye on is our pricing and make sure we're competitive. We're not here to gouge, because of our location, that's for sure. And I think there's a certain assumption that that takes place when you get away from the 'big box' stores. For the most part, we get comments that we're lower than Home Depot on items, which we like to hear."

The Warren family members also have heard more requests for outside laborers. Their store has become known for its recommendations of utility people.

"The people we recommend, we know that they have a good

track record," Ashley Warren said. "We've had their name from someone else that said, 'Yes, they've done a good job.' We've known them, or maybe dad's known them since DeFranco's, and we know they have a good reputation and things. We don't just get cards in and just give any name out; we try to make sure we know that they've done a couple of jobs – that they will show up, that they will be on time, that they're clean, that they're everything that everybody's looking for down here."

On Small Business Saturday, "We have a line of Melissa & Doug toys and educational products that we put a little discount on for the duration," Warren said.

In 2021, Warren's Village Hardware will mark 10 years in business. Again, Warren reiterated this milestone is possible because, "We listen to our customers, and if they need something/want something, we make sure that we can get it, if at all possible. And it's reasonable. And I think that's what people see, is that we're willing to go the extra mile; we're not just here to sell what

we have – we're here to sell what they need. And I think that makes a big difference."

Greg's Pools

840 Seneca St., Lewiston

With movie theaters and music venues shuttered, travel bans on almost every state and the inability to visit Canada, more and more people turned to their backyard pools over the summer.

Greg's Pools was deemed an essential business as it provides sanitizers, hot tub and pool cleaning supplies. It remained open, offering in-store, after-hours and curbside pickup.

"We've seen a lot more new customers coming in. I don't know if it's people that were shopping the 'big box' stores before maybe feel uncomfortable and they're coming in trying to support local business," Greg Robertson said. "We have lost some of our Canadian clientele, because we had some Canadians come over and they would buy stuff for their pools and spas. And now they can't get across the bridge. We do have a few customers that live in Canada that have summer homes over

Continued on Page 3



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Support Local Merchants

The Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce encourages people to "Shop Small" with their favorite businesses, because it not only boosts local economies, but also makes a big difference in communities around the world.

It said, "Businesses in our communities are doing everything they can to remain open and follow New York state guidelines for your safety. Please adhere to occupancy limits, mask wearing and social distance guidelines when shopping. Many of our business also offer contactless pick-up options for your convenience."

President Jennifer Pauly said she knows this year is different for everyone.

"Our businesses are gearing up for the holiday season and need your support more than ever," she noted. "Some of our businesses are offering an extra incentive for you to stop in. Please think about spending your funds locally. Many of our businesses also have online options, delivery or contactless pickup."

The Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce is offering a free \$15 River Region gift certificate to the first 75 people who stop by the office (895 Center St., Lewiston) beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 28.

There is one catch: The \$15 gift certificate is only valid that day at participating businesses. The full listing is available online at www.NiagaraRiverRegion.com.

This promotion will have the potential to immediately put more than \$1,000 back into member businesses on Small Business Saturday.

Niagara County merchants with Small Business Saturday Specials include:

- **A-1 Land Care** – 1527 Ridge Road, Lewiston: Fresh-cut Christmas trees, wreaths and poinsettias.
- **Anchor Spirits Wine and Liquor** – 113 Lockport St., Youngstown: Celebrating Shop Small Saturday since 2010.



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