



Publisher's Notebook

July 2021 Matt Winters

Time to set the stage for the roaring 2020s

The past year and a half — starting with the first vague news about a new virus from China — is deeply stamped into the memories of all we survivors. Unlike the half-forgotten great influenza pandemic of 1918-19, in our age of breathless 24/7 news coverage there's no chance COVID-19 will ever be swept under the rug.

Though the pandemic still is not entirely over, Oregon and Washington just finally lifted mandatory orders that made most of 2020 and the first months of 2021 so unpleasant for so many. Face masks aren't really any big deal, but needing to remember and wear them in so many settings became a burden — one that most endured without complaint, but which some equated to an unbearable dictatorial edict. And this conflict upset all Americans, who fundamentally want to get along and be left to coexist in peace.

Social distancing and limits on the numbers of people allowed in businesses and other inside spaces were similarly inconvenient for customers. But they weren't genuinely burdensome — unless you were the business owner or venue operator, or the employees they were forced to lay off. The past 15 months have seen many sleepless nights spent wondering how to

pay the bills.

Thanks to aggressive relief measures initiated by the Trump administration and expanded under President Biden, the damage to downtowns and households has been kept under control. What could have become a second Great Depression has instead become a better controlled chapter in capitalism's endless cycle of "creative destruction," in which enthusiastic new ideas replace businesses that were weak or outmoded. Empty retail spaces fill back up again. Workers forced from one job move onto others. And family finances return to equilibrium as income returns.

Here on the coast, though we certainly weren't spared from economic pain and the heartache of illnesses and deaths, we can count ourselves very lucky or smart to live in an area that turned into a safe retreat. This spring and summer have been extraordinarily busy, and there is no immediate end in sight. More are visiting than ever before, and a surprising number of people are moving here. This injects millions into the local economy, money that differentiates us from most places in the nation that lack our superb scenery, cultural resources, saltwater access and delicious food.

We can help ensure ongoing prosperity by taking none of this for

granted. There will never be a better time to practice our best customer-service skills. Within the limitations of staffing constraints, all businesses must do our best to offer high-quality products and services as conveniently and inexpensively as possible. Just because our communities are popular now doesn't mean they will be in two or five years. Friendly and competent service now will pay future dividends.

Beyond doing our best for everyone who visits and lives here, the next couple years offer continuing opportunities to reassess where we are and what we do as businesses and individuals. "Life is short" is the truest of all cliches. If we still love what we do, let's do it with all our imagination and might. But if we don't love it, this hopefully fading crisis offers the best chance ever to explore something new — a new commitment to excellence while having fun, a time to experiment with new products and business concepts, a chance to live in a new place or live in this old place in novel ways.

This summer — not quite post-COVID but an infinity better than last summer — can be the start of the roaring 2020s. Let's safeguard all we love here, while setting the stage for a fresh chapter of prosperity.



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