

# Businesses pivoted during the pandemic

Some adjustments  
have paid off

By **ABBEY McDONALD**

Coast River Business Journal

When the coronavirus pandemic first reached the North Coast of Oregon and Pacific County in 2020, businesses had no way to predict what would come next.

The following years brought closures, reopenings, social distancing measures and mandates that required frequent reevaluation. This summer, businesses still face the pressure of supply chain issues, rising costs of goods and staffing.

Karla Jensen, the president of the Long Beach Merchants Association, said the consensus of local businesses is that this summer feels slower than the last. She also owns Mermaid Inn & RV Park in Long Beach.

"I, personally, on the hotel-side, have been getting quite a few cancellations saying that somebody in the family has COVID, or they have COVID or they're afraid of COVID. So I would say it's definitely still affecting our businesses," she said.

Frequent pivots have left their mark on the way businesses operate on the North Coast.

"If there's one thing I see across all businesses is that they've definitely become more adaptive, because they had to. And they found themselves doing things that maybe weren't part of their original business or strategic plan," said Jessamyn Grace West, the director of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association.

In some cases, the changes businesses made to survive ended up setting them up for a more stable long term.

The Coast River Business Journal spoke with three businesses that made big changes in 2020 about how those changes panned out over two years into the pandemic.

## Brut Wine Bar

Lisa Parks opened Brut Wine Bar at the end of 2019, with a cozy indoor seating and bar area that was not built with social distancing in mind.

She immediately switched to doing all retail, which allowed her to stay afloat until another business owner threw her a lifeline in the spring of 2021.

The city had approved several parklets — the ability to convert a parking spot to outdoor seating — including one at Merry Time Bar and Grill across the street.

"Todd and Terry (the owners) realized that they had plenty of seating, and I had none," Parks said. "And that's when I started doing outside seating, and it was life-changing. It was lifesaving."

This summer, the indoor seating at the bar is



**'WE COULD  
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AND IT'S  
LOVELY.'**

**Chris Holen**

Nekst Event

Richard Mavis, 14-month old Simon Stark and Amanda Stark, visitors from Portland, enjoy the sunshine at Brut Wine Bar's parklet.

ABBEY McDONALD

open, but Parks has noticed that customers still prefer sitting outside on sunny days, year-round.

In July, the owner of Street 14 Cafe downtown built a covered parklet without city authorization that was ordered to be disassembled. The action led city councilors to indicate that they will revisit the parklet program, and its requirements.

"It does look like City Council is going to, at least at some point, define it a little better. Which is OK, to make sure that we have rules around it so we can't just have everybody put something up," Parks said. "So I'm hoping that it stays, because people love it. But that definitely was not helpful."

Along with the parklet, taking the risk to expand her retail options during the social distancing requirements has benefited the business.

"A lot of it is because of support from locals. I mean, all of it is because of that. Because of locals continuing to shop small and shop local. That's why I'm still here," she said.

Parks said that though business has been successful, she's thinking about COVID-19 more than ever. She's a one-woman business, and is now serving twice as many people.

"At any point, if I got COVID, I'm closed for five to 10 days and that's a huge loss of income. But you do what you have to do because you don't want to make people sick," she said. "But I think people are still thinking about it, and nervous. And still, for the most part prefer to be outside."

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