



Matt and Meghan Ruona are the owners of Four Paws on the Beach with locations in Cannon Beach and Manzanita.

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in the front yard, eyes glowing with a cigar between its teeth. Lee said a customer was driving from Astoria that day to pick it up.

A surprising positive element of the pandemic, Lee said, was time. He's been able to condense five years of home improvement projects into one, and the couple has been making more art.

Lee said he felt lucky to have bought the property before housing prices rose and that they didn't have to deal with any substantial overhead costs when the pandemic hit.

"It sucks, life's different," Yvonne Lee said. "But we're pretty optimistic and easygoing. We roll with the punches."

"If we had overhead, I can't even imagine," Danny Lee added.

'We're still struggling, but we'll get through it'

Two years ago, when the pandemic hit, Ronda Jean Vivlemore was deciding whether to buy A Whisper in Time Photography from its previous owners in Seaside.

"I was like, do I really want to sign this paperwork? Because I was figuring that something serious was going to happen with the whole pandemic. And I decided to go along with it," she said.

After a few closures toward the beginning, business is going steadier now. Customers, often from out of town, fill up the weekend's appointment schedule to don corsets, cowboy and pirate hats and sailor outfits for old-fashioned souvenir photos.

She said she's happy she signed the papers.

"I mean, we're still struggling, but we'll get through it," she said.

Vivlemore said she expects things to pick up this summer during the peak tourism season.

"I think things are coming around and people are starting to get back to work and going out and about," she said. "I think the people who are still in business are going to turn around, and will stay for another year."

A surge of customers

Meghan and Matt Ruona, owners of Four Paws on the Beach in Manzanita, opened a second location in Cannon Beach in January 2020.

Though pet stores were considered essential businesses, they opted to close the new location for several weeks at the start of the pandemic and focus on their Manzanita location, which they bought from its previous owners in 2015.

When they reopened, Matt Ruona said it felt like "summer on steroids" for a month and a half, with an unprecedented amount of customers coming in.

"It's really felt like people had kind of rediscovered the Oregon Coast as a destination when there was no flying to Europe or going to the East Coast," he said. "It kind of felt like everyone from Idaho to California went, 'Well, where can we get in the car and go to that's fun and exciting?'"

The pandemic also brought a new, common occurrence: four-month-old puppies.

"Almost every day, if not several times a week. You have folks coming in with a four-month-old puppy. Having a four-month-old puppy is just the refrain that I hear over and over again," he said.

"COVID adoptions went up," Meghan Ruona said.

He said that during the surge in visitors last summer people seemed happy to go shopping while on vacation, even buying coats for each one of their dogs.

Matt Ruona said he hopes that festivals like the animal rescue fundraiser "Muttzanita" can return. He noted how popular Cannon Beach's annual Corgi Beach Day has been for pet owners.

The couple said that community support has made a significant impact on their business during the pandemic. Matt Ruona said many customers went out of their way to shop locally.

"We didn't know what to expect. We were new to retail and owning our own business, and so to see that outpouring of support has been tremendous and just so heartwarming. We are just so grateful," he said.