

Closed from A1

— it's just something that's going to be delivered in a different manner in the next four weeks," said Rinck.

More traditional restaurants and cafes downtown are also bracing for stormy economic weather.

Stacy Solomon, owner of Stacy's Covered Bridge Restaurant, is cautiously optimistic for his business.

"It's a pretty big impact," he said. "We're not a really a to-go type restaurant. ... We do have our share of it, but for the most part that's not how we're set up."

Still, Solomon described the sudden statewide ban in unflattering terms.

"I thought it was a little extreme," he said. "They could have taken some time and let the restaurants prepare for it instead of just dropping it on them at one time."

Solomon acknowledged the shift as having a potential existential threat to business and emphasized the importance of such establishments in the city.

"It's tough on all the restaurants," he said. "In smaller towns, the restaurants are kind of the hub."

Like other businesses, Solomon is concerned for his employees.

"I've had to pretty much lay off most of my crew," he said. "A lot of



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

A day after the announcement, restaurants and bars throughout town abided by the statewide ban on dine-in service.

them don't rely just on a paycheck. They rely on tips, too. Unemployment doesn't really make up for it."

Downtown restaurant Jack Sprats, too, has seen the laying off of several employees as the business transitions to take-out.

Outside of downtown, Oba Ramen, a relative newcomer to the Cottage Grove restaurant family, has closed completely for the next four weeks.

On Tuesday morning, Oba Ramen General Manager Joseph Suk and restaurant staff stood in front of Cottage Grove High School delivering food to families of school children alongside the district's "Meal for Kids" program.

In anticipation of its closing, the restaurant had emptied its stock of perishables and cooked

ing delivery options. "[We] can at least keep a few people employed by putting out food to go," said Caridio, speaking to the need to keep the local business energetic.

The Brew Station, too, will put the take-out model to trial for a few days to see how the community responds.

"If it doesn't work for us, then we will cut off the kitchen and still stay for growler fills that people can access from the feed store," said Rinck. "We'll go down to a skeleton crew, most definitely. We want this business to be here and viable for our employees when this is over."

Enduring the economic hit will require not only innovation by local businesses, but effort from locally-minded community members who want to participate in the city's economic vibrancy.

While health authorities urge citizens to practice social distancing and take hygienic steps to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, Smith expressed a worry that a sense of isolation may set in for some.

"I'm concerned this will be divisive. To avoid a divisive situation, we will have to purposefully unite and find those touchstones that are necessary to unite around," she said. "We have a community that looks

out for one another, but I think communication right now — a united communication that is consistent in theme and tone — is incredibly important."

For many business owners, this means maintaining common sense vis a vis the coronavirus outbreak, but also reaching out to the establishments they enjoy through the safest means possible, either to communicate needs or to extend patronage.

"It would be really great if [people] adjusted their habits to think locally and support those businesses they want to see still here once we get through this," said Caridio, stressing possible repercussions if the community overly isolates. "I could see that restaurants and bars that are on the edge aren't going to survive."

Solomon remained optimistic economic stability would prevail.

"I think the support is there in the community. I really do," he said. "We've been here 21 years and they've always supported us, so we've been pretty fortunate for the most part. And I'm sure it'll continue."

For her part, Rinck sees employees' welfare as a key to emerging from the situation economically unscathed.

"They're at the forefront of our mind," she said. "The best way to support our businesses is by supporting the people that we employ."

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