

Menu from A1

resorted to take-out services or shut down all together.

On May 15, Lane County was among several Oregon counties approved to begin Phase One of the state's reopening blueprint. Among guidelines for restaurants and bars are the requirements to implement six feet of social distancing, limit groups to parties of 10 or fewer, end food and drink consumption by 10 p.m. and instruct workers to wear masks.

Each Cottage Grove food and beverage business has responded differently and, though the Chamber has not received news that any local businesses are folding, Neigh pointed out that the reopening is far from normal.

"It's not going to be business as usual," she said. "I don't think anybody really knows what the 'new normal' is going to be. Everybody's just trying to play it by ear right now and keep everybody safe."

With the challenge of meeting safety guidelines, many businesses throughout town have opted to simply continue offering take-out. Downtown establishments, though, have begun to see more traffic as some are trying to optimize the opportunity.

Main Street pub Axe

and Fiddle, for instance, now offers limited seating (though none at the bar) and encourages reservations for dine-ins while still offering take-out services.

Likewise, The Brewstation has taken advantage of its spacious outside seating area while trying to maintain social-distancing measures and accommodate an isolation-weary public.

"Phase one has reduced our footprint of table space, partially because of the updates/remodel we are doing in the music space of our pub and also because of spacing of tables and chairs to meet the safe distancing requirements," said Brewstation owner Dale Smith. "We are set up to clean between all customers including tables, chairs, menus and the bar area. Hand sanitizer is available inside and out in the beer garden and safe distancing is marked on the floor."

In addition, staff at both pubs will continue to be outfitted with masks.

Stacy's Covered Bridge Restaurant has also seen an uptick in customers as the business has adjusted its seating and opened up to limited dine-ins.

"We're big enough that we can social distance," said owner Stacy Solomon. "And we've still got the to-go orders, which we're hoping to contin-



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

**Grovers turned out at The Brewstation May 15 for the first day of the county's Phase One reopening, which allows restricted sit-down service in food and beverage establishments. While some local businesses have made adjustments to come into compliance with state requirements, others have delayed reopening as they strategize ways to meet the guidelines.**

ue because there are still some people not quite comfortable going out in public yet."

The restaurant's reopening on the first day of Phase One saw a robust turnout, one which Solomon said nearly overwhelmed the limited staff.

"I think people are just excited to get back out again," said Solomon.

Other establishments like Buster's Main Street Café, though, do not have such a spatial advantage. Buster's closed well before the governor's executive order and reopened May 19

providing only take-out. Unfortunately, the county's shift to Phase One has not been a financial boon for the café.

"We didn't open for dine-in because of the way the tables have to be situated," explained owner Paul Tocco. "There's no space and it's not worth the risk."

As such, the café continues to offer its take-out service exclusively.

**Lingering Impact**

Though there is a relative return to stability among some establishments, the impact of the lockdown has taken its

toll on both businesses and their workers.

Brewstation, for example, was forced to lay off nine of its 13 employees, said Smith. A skeleton crew continued to offer take-out growlers, canned and bottled products and eventually made-to-go food, but Smith estimates business dropped to 25 percent of its usual revenue stream. Brewstation's adjoining feed store has continuing to bring in revenue, though, and Smith attributed part of the business's ability to ride out the storm to the community.

"Business was still greatly reduced in the pub, though our community was very generous in the frequenting us for to-go and their tips and concern for our team," said Smith, adding that business has increased to about 50 percent of its usual stream. "It's inching up day by day."

Other businesses have reported similar layoff rates and drops in sales. Even with the reopening attracting more customers, some business owners cannot yet afford to rehire their former

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