

THE Voice of Business



Big Opportunities Ahead
for Downtown Fairfield



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The Voice of Business for Fairfield and Suisun City, California

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Debi Tavey
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Fairfield, Suisun City show resilience through pandemic: Now it's time to look ahead

We began a unique journey a year ago through uncharted territory. The unfortunate impact of Covid-19 left us lost, frightened and utterly raw as we were slowly stripped of what we then called normal.

There is hope today after surpassing the challenges we faced since March 2020, and opportunities lie ahead for the cities of Fairfield and Suisun City.

Through the lens as Chair of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, I watched our city leaders work collaboratively with businesses to provide masks, educate consumers and find innovative ways to keep our economy going.

Suisun City Mayor Lori Wilson, for example, created the Economic Pandemic Impact Committee to discuss and implement best practices to jump-start the economy in a safe and healthy way; ensure businesses have the support they need to reopen; and identify ways to expand businesses or services. And the reason? Mayor Wilson knew that local businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Likewise, the City of Fairfield provided grant opportunities to support our local businesses and keep their doors open.

Through the lens as a resident of Fairfield, I witnessed many of my friends support our local retail businesses and restaurants because we knew this would help keep our economy going. We came together as a community and realized the impact of thinking outside the box.

It's now time to create a stronger community by promoting our assets and supporting business retention. As such, we must be stewards of the Fairfield and Suisun City communities in order to create a vibrant and robust economic environment.

The Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce

understands this and has worked diligently to keep our members moving through the tiers. And there is no doubt that this mission and purpose were made through the countless efforts of our Chamber Board of Directors, Chamber President Debi Tavey and our Ambassadors, all of whom truly care about the well-being of our communities.

The Chamber is now ready to take its first step in providing an opportunity for people to once again see their friends and colleagues through a socially distanced and safe outdoor activity – a golf tournament!

Get ready to take to the greens May 27, 2021, as the Chamber presents its Golf Classic at Rancho Solano. This is a great – and safe – opportunity to get out, meet with friends, and network with professionals and top business leaders of the area. More information can be found by calling 707-425-4625, ext. 101.

Fundraisers, such as our golf tournament, are key to maintaining our many programs at the Chamber, such as Leadership Today; Lunch and Learn; and the Inspire Program – a partnership we have with the Solano County Office of Education. And the impact of these programs is countless. Leadership Today, for instance, has given back more than \$300,000 to nonprofits in our community, while the Inspire Program introduces students to our businesses by providing firsthand experiences and future possibilities.

Residents and businesses in the cities of Fairfield and Suisun City have shown themselves to be resilient, compassionate and able to face any challenge put forth. I am beyond proud to be part of this community.

And so, our journey continues . . .

Andrea Garcia

Chairwoman, Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce

chairman investors



CHAIRWOMAN



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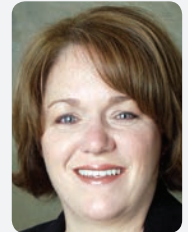
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SBDC Launches Inclusivity Project for Black Business Owners

It is estimated that in February 2020, a month before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the local economy, more than 1 million Black-owned businesses were operating in the United States.

By mid-April 2020, more than 40% of those businesses – 440,000 – had closed their doors for good.

COVID has impacted all segments of the economy but especially hard hit has been the Black community. To help business owners and entrepreneurs rebuild, the Northern California Small Business Development Center has launched the Inclusivity Project.

The NorCal SBDC network, which includes the Solano SBDC, hopes the Inclusivity Project will shine a light on the needs of Black entrepreneurs and provide a safety net that can help them preserve their existing businesses or start a new enterprise in Northern California.

Expert advising and training opportunities are among the resources available at no-cost through this program, as well as a capital component that aims to secure \$100 million in funding for 1,000 Black-owned businesses.

“A project of this magnitude is important at any time but in light of COVID and its impact on our businesses, it’s even more vital now,” said Solano SBDC Director Tim Murrill. “We are one of the most diverse counties in the country and our Black-owned businesses have been hit hard.”

Solano County business owners who sign up for the Inclusivity Project will be paired with Solano SBDC Advisor Cynthia Cowart. She is the Solano SBDC’s liaison with the Solano Black Chamber of Commerce and has more than 25 years of professional business experience. She specializes in business planning.

Cowart believes connecting Inclusivity Project clients with Black business advisors will help them to open up and have deeper conversations about their businesses and lives.

“You want to have a degree of comfort and trust with who you are speaking with and what better way to build that bond than to speak with someone who has a similar background as you do,” she said. “Recovery is definitely key right now. Hopefully, this project will offer the assistance, the guidance, the mentorship that business owners need to succeed.”



You can learn more and register for the Inclusivity Project at theinclusivity-project.com.

Any existing business or start-up with less than 500 employees can utilize the SBDC’s free individualized and confi-

dential advising services. In Solano County, more than 99% of businesses would qualify. Business advisers are experienced in a variety of areas, including lending, business plans, marketing, sales, strategy, leadership, restaurant operations, human resources, retail and product pricing.

Learn more and apply to be a business client at www.solanosbdc.org.

More SBDC programs

The Solano SBDC offers free, individualized, and confidential one-on-one advising for existing businesses and start-ups with 500 or fewer employees. Business advisers are experienced in a variety of areas, including business plans, marketing, restaurant operations, human resources, retail and product pricing.

In addition to one-on-one advising and webinars, the Solano SBDC has several ongoing programs for business owners, including:

Biz Rx: Developed by the Solano SBDC and launched in 2020, Biz Rx features two key components, both free to participants – a webinar series on marketing and revenue improvement opportunities as well as a confidential one-on-one assessment of your business with a SBDC advisor.

Entrepreneurs Roundtable – Vallejo: This monthly program is funded by the city of Vallejo to help their business owners navigate the impacts of COVID-19.

NxLevel: The NxLevel Entrepreneurial Training Program is an 11-week comprehensive, practical business education and enhancement program for serious entrepreneurs. As part of the program, all participants hear from experts from multiple business disciplines and develop and present a business plan.

For further information on Solano SBDC, please contact Marketing Specialist Brianna Boyd at bboyd@solanowdb.org or 209-814-4836 (cell) or SBDC Director Tim Murrill at tmurrill@solanowdb.org or 707-863-3554. ♦

Big Opportunities Ahead



for

Downtown Fairfield



If you take a stroll through downtown right now, you may see a woman rushing to her car with takeout food and hear men laughing in a nearly empty barbershop. Cars drive down a busy street passing vacant storefronts. But there's still plenty of hope for the downtown districts. Business owners and city officials have been working together to create a renovation plan. The Chambers spoke with the people spearheading the revitalization campaigns in Downtown

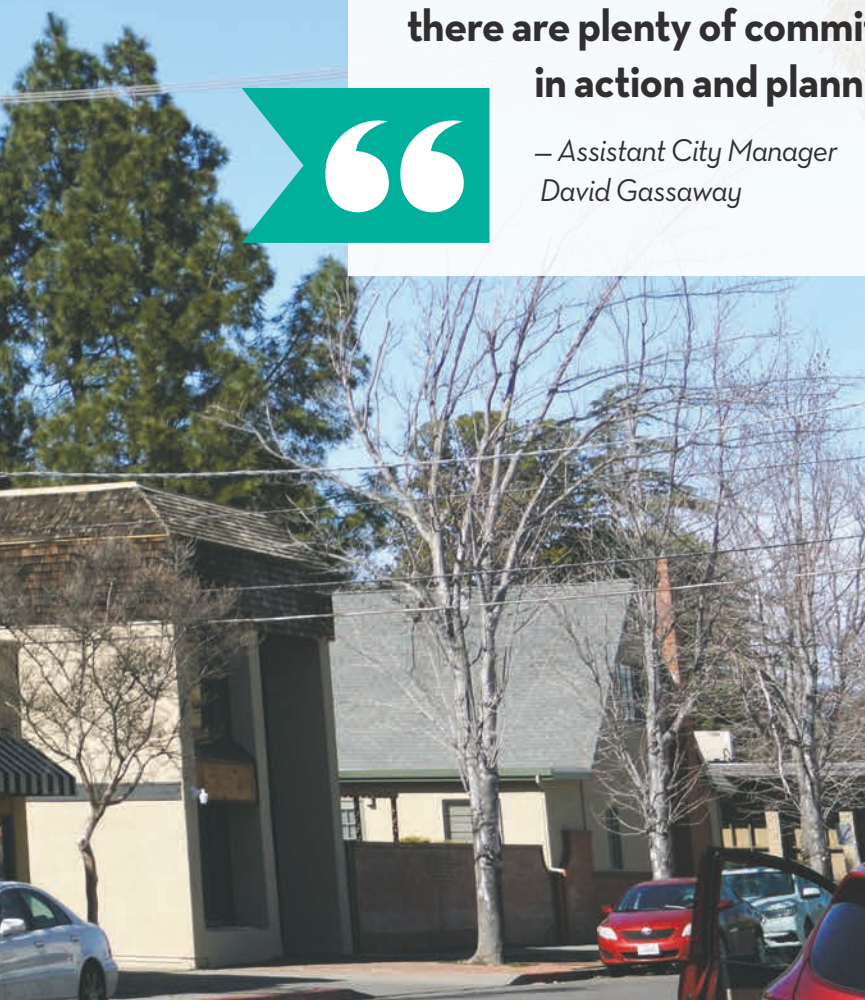
“Think of it like an iceberg. Above the surface you see a bit of action going on, but underneath there are plenty of committees in action and planning.”

– Assistant City Manager
David Gassaway



Vacaville and Fairfield. David Gassaway, the newly appointed Assistant City Manager of Fairfield, is optimistic and glad to be working on the downtown project. Gassaway along with Fairfield's City Manager Stefan Chatwin are both recent hires. “The community has been frustrated that nothing is happening, but now that we're on board, things are moving along.”

When speaking with the Chamber, Gassaway was excited to bring up the plans for the Heart of Fairfield. “The Heart of Fairfield is an adopted plan that started in 2017 with three distinct areas. One area is the Fairfield Transportation Center, the second is West Texas Street, and the third is Downtown. Our goal is to revitalize the areas. We want, particularly Downtown, to be a social and entertainment hub.” Gassaway says this is a 20-year plan which also tackles new housing and the homeless population.





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Unlike many cities that run a Business Improvement District (BID), which helps with street maintenance, marketing, even policing the homeless, Fairfield runs what Gassaway describes as an old-school PBA, Parking and Business Improvement Area. “We don’t have a formal BID; we have a PBA so the money we get for the area comes from a business license tax. The revenue is only \$30,000 per year.” Instead of relying on the PBA money to improve the area, the City of Fairfield is focused on making it easier for property owners to bring in new business.

The city will start by making the zoning codes and application processes cheaper. Additionally, they want to streamline the process to make approval quicker. There is also an inventive package for commercial property owners known as the Facade Improvement Grant. “The City of Fairfield’s Facade, Outdoor Seating, and Signage Improvement Program is a 50/50 matching program designed to support businesses throughout the Heart of Fairfield Plan Area, providing the opportunity for property and business



The old Mr. Bicycle building on West Texas Street will be the new home of the Bella Roma restaurant.

owners to reinvest in their properties,” according to the City of Fairfield website. Eligible improvements include storefront and entrance decoration, exterior signs, outdoor seating, lighting, windows, painting and more. Restaurants such as Rustwater and Saffron have already utilized the Facade Grant.

In addition, the COF has a “Retail to Restaurant” initiative; it will partner property owners with architects to transform old retail space into restaurant use so more people can come to the area and stay while sipping on a coffee or beer and lounging with friends.

“Think of it like an iceberg. Above the surface you see a bit of action going on, but underneath there are plenty of committees in action and planning,” says Gassaway. As early as next month, the COF will put in more parklets and build additional outdoor dining space. By June, COF will have installed traffic control devices and removable bollards to close down Texas Street for events and Farmers Markets. “We are still building out our event schedule, but we want this to be the cultural and entertainment part of town.” ♦

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President Biden OKs 2-month Extension of the Paycheck Protection Program

With overwhelming bipartisan support, President Biden at the end of March approved a two-month extension of the Paycheck Protection Program.

Business owners now have until May 31, 2021 to submit their applications for a First or Second Draw PPP loan. The law also gives the Small Business Administration an extra 30 days (through June 30, 2021) to process PPP applications.

First Draw PPP Loans are for borrowers who have not received a PPP loan before August 8, 2020. Second Draw PPP Loans are for eligible small businesses with 300 employees or less who did receive a First Draw PPP loan and will use or have used the full amount only for authorized services. Second Draw applicants must also be able to demonstrate at least a 25% reduction in gross receipts between comparable quarters in 2019 and 2020. The maximum amount of a Second Draw PPP loan is \$2 million.

Other key PPP updates include:

PPP borrowers can set their PPP loan's covered period to be any length between 8 and 24 weeks to best meet their business needs.

Borrowers qualify for full loan forgiveness if, during the covered period, employee and compensation levels are maintained; at least 60 % of the proceeds are spent on payroll costs; loan proceeds are spent on payroll and other eligible expenses, including rent and utilities.

PPP loans will cover additional expenses, including operations expenditures, property damage costs, supplier costs, and worker protection expenditures.

The Program's eligibility is expanded to include 501(c)(6)s, housing cooperatives, direct marketing organizations, among other types of organizations.

Applicants must apply for a PPP through a participating lender. You can search for a lender near you at sba.gov/ppp.

The first round of the PPP, which ran from March to August 2020, helped 5.2 million small businesses keep 51 million American workers employed.

The SBA also officially opened the long-anticipated



METRO SERVICES

Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) application portal April 8 for operators of live venues, live performing arts organizations, museums, and movie theaters to apply for critical relief. Many of the eligible entities, which also include live venue promoters, theatrical producers, and talent representatives, were some of the first that had to shutter their doors a year ago in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program includes over \$16 billion in grants to shuttered venues, to be administered by SBA's Office of Disaster Assistance. Eligible applicants may qualify for grants equal to 45% of their gross earned revenue, with the maximum amount available for a single grant award of \$10 million.

The Solano Small Business Development Center is here to assist local businesses applying for both the PPP and the SVOG. You can speak with a local representative from the Solano SBDC by calling 707-646-1071 or email info@solanosbdc.org.

You can learn more about the PPP and find a lender near you at sba.gov/ppp.

For more information on the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant: svograntportal.sba.gov. ♦

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WDB Partners with Facebook to Build Digital Marketing Skills

New program will give job seekers paid training and summer fellowships at Solano businesses

Nearly 50 job seekers in Solano County will gain valuable skills and steady employment over the next five months through a digital marketing training program designed by Facebook that culminates with paid summer fellowships at local businesses.

The Workforce Development Board of Solano County is partnering with Facebook to bring Career Connections to the area, leveraging the network and business support of the Solano Small Business Development Center.

Following several weeks of applicant screening, 49 job seekers have been accepted into Career Connections. They will soon begin a one-month online training with Facebook to develop and sharpen their digital marketing skills. Each fellow will be placed in a Solano County business this

summer where they will use their new skills to promote these businesses on social media platforms.

Both job seekers and business owners will have access to additional trainings and resources from Facebook throughout the summer. Participating business owners will also receive a \$500 Facebook/Instagram advertising credit. The fellows will be paid with federal workforce funds and the program is at no cost to business owners.

“Many of our business owners have realized the importance of having a strong digital presence over the past year but may have struggled with how to build that presence” said Heather Henry, executive director of the Workforce Development Board of Solano County. “At the same time, digital marketing is a growing opportunity that can be

utilized in almost any industry. This project is a valuable resource coming at a very pivotal point in the pandemic recovery.”

The demand for digital marketers has grown considerably in the last decade with the rise in social media and online advertising – 29% in the past five years alone. The skills gained in digital marketing can also be utilized in management, scientific, technical, or medical industries, as well as the traditional advertising and public relation fields.

The job seekers selected for the Career Connections program come from all cities in Solano County. They include recent high school graduates, college students and seasoned professionals who want to develop their digital marketing skills.



For many, Career Connections is coming at an opportune time. Approximately 40% of the people who have lost jobs in Solano County due to the COVID-19 pandemic were between the ages of 20 and 34.

All job seekers in Career Connections will be paired with a job placement coach from the Workforce Development Board who will assist them in finding permanent employment following their fellowship.

The Workforce Development Board of Solano County provides employment-related services for job seekers and businesses in Solano County. The WDB also serves as host to the Solano SBDC, which offers free, individualized, and confidential one-on-one advising for existing businesses and start-ups with 500 or fewer employees. ♦

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- Activities & Excursions
- Housekeeping
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