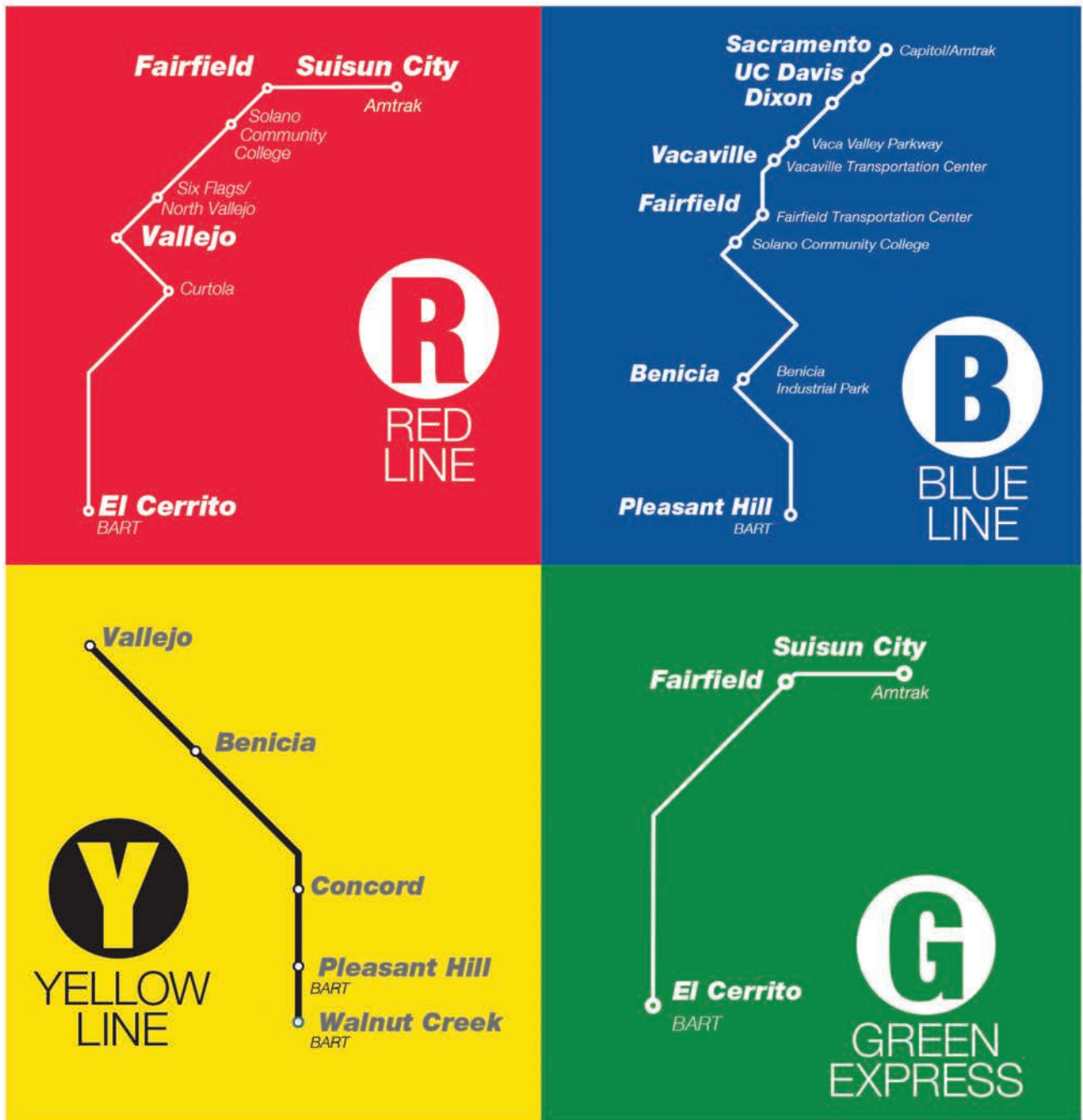


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*Solano SBDC and Workforce Development Board  
become valuable resources for businesses  
navigating the COVID-19 crisis*

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1111 Webster St., Fairfield, CA 94533  
707.425.4625 | Fax: 707.425.0826



**Debi Tavey**  
President/CEO  
Debi@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com



**Tonya Dretzka**  
Director of Membership  
Tonya@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com

CHAIRWOMAN



**Andrea Garcia**

Touro University of California  
1310 Club Drive  
Vallejo CA 94592  
707-638-5272  
andrea.garcia@tu.edu

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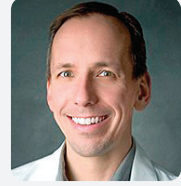
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# We're here to help when you need it

The Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce is going to continue advocating on behalf of our businesses and members while working with our government officials during this COVID-19 pandemic.

The goal for our Chamber is to ensure the information we share is accurate, informative and researched.

Likewise, the goal for our community is to continue to support locals in ways that are safe and appropriate for them. In the near future, you will see innovative ways our businesses will continue serving their customers.

We are in this together and need to be calm, rational and considerate.

In the best interest of you, your business and our community, we have suspended all networking, meetings and programming events until further notice.

We are working with our community partners – SBDC, Workforce Development Board and local chambers – to give you the most current information available. We are also connecting with our local, state and federal officials.

The Fairfield Suisun Chamber of Commerce is your resource for business information and we are here to advocate for you. We will provide our businesses with assistance programs as they become available.

We are available by phone 707-425-4625 or email [Debi@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com](mailto:Debi@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com) or [Tonya@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com](mailto:Tonya@fairfieldsuisunchamber.com).

Please let us know what you need or questions you may have. Remember, we are all in this together.

Regards,

**Debi Tavey**

President/CEO

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# A BEACON



Monte Hoover, co-owner of Gillespie's Abbey Carpet and Floor in Fairfield, left, has been a Solano SBDC business client for years. His advisor is SBDC director Tim Murrill.

# FOR BUSINESS

*Once a 'best-kept secret,' two organizations become valuable resources for businesses navigating the COVID-19 crisis*



BY BRIANNA BOYD

In the first days after the novel coronavirus brought business and the world as we knew it to a screeching halt in mid-March, Tara Cruz did her best to stay positive.

The owner of Touch of Paradise Spa in downtown Fairfield, Cruz initially thought the closures would last for a week or two. But as the days and weeks went on, a stark reality set in.

“I still get emotional thinking about it,” said Cruz, who fought back tears as she remembered the first month of the COVID-19 outbreak. “This is where I had built everything and put in all my time. We were finally seeing a profit again, and then COVID hit us. And all of it was out of my control, my hands were tied and there was nothing I could do.

“By that third week, I knew I had to do something.”

One of her first calls was to Tim Murrill, the director of the Solano Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Cruz has been an SBDC client for five years, utilizing the free one-on-one consulting and business workshops as she grew her business from an independent consultant to a brick and mortar downtown. She considers Murrill a mentor.

“Whenever I have business lows, I’d text Tim late at night and he’d call me right back in the morning and talk me

through it,” she said. “He is so reassuring.”

As he shared with her the loan opportunities available to businesses, he told her about layoff aversion fund grants that were available through Solano County’s Workforce Development Board. The SBDC, which provides its free services to any business with less than 500 employees, operates under the umbrella of the Workforce Development Board. Both organizations share office space at 500 Chadbourne Road.

Cruz was already familiar with the Workforce Development Board. Her first job, at 19 years old, was through the organization’s On the Job training program. It was such a good experience for her that when she opened her own business, she had two receptionists who were also part of the program.

She applied for and was awarded the grant from the Workforce Development Board and utilized the funds to purchase software and equipment that allows her to offer virtual nails, facials and microdermabrasion treatments to clients. The loan also helped pay her rent downtown.

With so many uncertainties still looming because of COVID, Cruz is working with an SBDC business advisor on transitioning her business to online retail.

“Everyone wants to send me condolences because of what is going on but I tell them, ‘I’m good, guys, I’m OK!’” Cruz exclaimed. “COVID has put a lot of people on a different path and this is where our creative and innovative skills have to come together.

“I’m just so thankful for the Workforce Development Board and the SBDC,” she added. “I’m so passionate about these two programs. If I didn’t have those two on my team, I know I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

April Ziomek-Portillo, the business services senior manager at the Workforce Development Board, was responsible for overseeing the layoff aversion fund grants. Solano County alone awarded 49 grants, totaling a little more than \$207,000.



Tara Cruz, center, at the ribbon cutting for her business, A Touch of Paradise Spa. As she navigates COVID-19 and its impact on her business, she is working with Solano SBDC advisors to transition her business to online retail.

***I’m so passionate about these two programs. If I didn’t have those two on my team, I know I wouldn’t be where I am today.***

– TARA CRUZ

Altogether, 335 local jobs were saved.

Many of the people applying for the grants were hearing about the Workforce Development Board for the first time, which gave her the opportunity to highlight the free services they offer to businesses, from recruitment and job fairs to training and layoff aversion assistance. Business owners were also connected with the SBDC and their free one-on-one consulting services.

“We are probably one of the best-kept secrets in Solano County for business resources, along with the SBDC,” Ziomek-Portillo said. “Between the two organizations, we can not only strengthen a business’ talent resources but also their business as a whole and both are at no cost.

“People need to know they are not alone in this,” she added. “They need to be able to ask, ‘where are the resources, where can I get help?’ To me, this is a huge opportunity for businesses to survive and thrive here in Solano County.”

## An Unexpected Catalyst

Both the Workforce Development Board (WDB) and the



Small Business Development Center (SBDC) have been operating in Solano County for years. WDB has been around for more than 30 years, while the Solano SBDC was established in the early 2000s. The Workforce Development Board has been the 'host' of SBDC since January 2019.

The leaders of both organizations have heard the words "best-kept secret" so often that WDB Executive Director Heather Henry laughingly said, "I'm going to scream if I hear it again – we want the word out there!"

The coronavirus proved to be the unexpected catalyst as the pandemic brought businesses large and small to a screeching halt, wreaking havoc on the economy with layoffs, furloughs and closures. Business owners searched desperately for up-to-date information, not knowing where or who to turn to.

"Almost overnight, we went from being a community secret to a valuable resource for a lot of small businesses," Murrill said.

It was March 15 when the SBDC's phone began to ring and the calls did not stop for weeks. On the line were frantic business owners, from companies large and small, new and established, brick-and-mortar and home entrepreneurs, all looking for information on the Small Business Association (SBA) loans, most notably the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the Economic Impact Disaster Loan (EIDL).

Between March and May, the Solano SBDC assisted more than 600 businesses with SBA loan questions. Some of those

businesses went on to become SBDC clients, allowing them to access free one-on-one consulting. The organization has a dozen business advisers, all experienced in various aspects of business from strategy and marketing to financial management and capital acquisition. All received training on the SBA loan programs and then quickly went to work coordinating one-on-one phone calls and Zoom meetings with their clients. In the weeks that followed, they walked them step by step through the loan process and provided an "ear" that so many needed in the turmoil.

"Most businesses I find have a quiet, humble pride," said SBDC consultant Peter Gray, who specializes in business growth and operations. "They don't want to ask for help, they don't think they should ask for help but we've come to a time when they know they need additional perspective and they need to connect with resources they've never had to look for before. They are looking to learn and they are looking for guidance. They just want to get through this period and then get back to running the business they love."

In Solano County alone, 4,267 PPP loans were awarded to businesses. Most – 3,195 – were under \$150,000 while a little over 500 were more than \$150,000. Of those awards, 1,286 were individuals (independent contractors, self-employed or sole proprietorships), 1,250 were corporations, and 116 were non-profits. More than 41,500 jobs in Solano County were retained because of PPP loans.



Graduates of the Workforce Development Board's Youth Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Training Program with Executive Director Heather Henry.



Heather Henry, executive director of the Solano WDB, center, with Congressman John Garamendi, left, and Solano WDB chair Fadi Halabi at the ribbon cutting for the new WDB offices on Chadbourne Road.

The Solano SBDC confirms that 54 of their business clients received SBA loans totaling \$6.5 million. Advisers have continued to work regularly with these clients, helping them to navigate the post-COVID economy.

“In these last months, I’ve witnessed resiliency like no other,” said SBDC adviser Seanna Asper, who specializes in finance and QuickBooks. “Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy and it has been an honor to help them weather this storm. I have been inspired by their willingness to do what has to be done.”

In addition to individual consulting, the SBDC continues to offer workshops led by the advisers. In the past, workshops were in a class setting in Fairfield but they have since transitioned to webinars, making them more accessible for businesses throughout Solano County.

From January to July, the Solano SBDC offered 65 workshops with nearly 500 participants. This is already twice the number of workshops and participants from 2019 and does not include the webinars hosted by the NorCal SBDC. All workshops are free.

When the shelter-at-home restrictions were lifted, Murrill and Henry partnered to offer 15 re-opening webinars, all based on individual business sectors, in a three-week period.

“So many small business owners have given up their life savings to start their business,” Murrill said. “It has been an unprecedented and challenging time for all of them. To be able to do something to help these businesses survive this crisis was one of the most gratifying things I’ve ever been able to do in my career.”

Meanwhile, down the hall from Murrill’s office, the WDB’s American Job Center is abuzz with activity. While the Vallejo

job center closed at the onset of the pandemic, the center on Chadbourne Road has remained open Monday through Friday, providing job seekers with phones and computers to connect with unemployment services and a resource lab to work on resumes, job search and Zoom interviews. All services are free.

Between March and July, the center connected with more than 4,000 job seekers. The two offices typically serve approximately 9,000 people every year but Henry expects that number to be significantly higher in 2020 because of the pandemic’s impact on the workforce.

“We also offer more intensive services for people who need individualized support, such as job training or coaching,” Henry said. “We can do supportive service funding for basis needs, like rent, utilities or access to technology. We help pay for equipment or services for someone if something stands in their way of getting or keeping a job. For example, if someone is not able to afford a computer required for employment or if they need a specific type of training, they can reach out to us.”

There are myriad services offered by the Workforce Development Board – Henry oversees a staff of 40 – but the organization is best known for the recruitment support it offers to businesses in Solano County. In the past, the WDB has hosted recruitment events for companies and business sectors and coordinates the NorCal Career Fair at Solano Community College.

While the recruitment events have been put on hold during the pandemic, the employment programs are ongoing. WDB coordinates a youth job program with the Solano County Office of Education that provides wages to young people to have intern experience in the workforce. For adults, there is On the Job Training – the same program Tara Cruz went through when she was 19 years old – where WDB partners with area businesses to help job seekers gain important skills for the workforce. As part of this program, the Workforce Development Board funds a portion of the employee’s wages and in return, the employer trains them on essential job skills. Since the pandemic began, the WDB has increased its reimbursement to businesses, allowing them to bring their employees back to work.

It has been heart wrenching for both the WDB and SBDC to hear from businesses about the number of layoffs and furloughs that have been implemented since March. More than 84,200 Solano County residents have applied for unemployment services and Fairfield’s unemployment rate in June was still at 13.5 percent.

“We try not to focus on business closures and layoffs but COVID has unfortunately made that a very stark reality,” Henry said.

Ziomek-Portillo oversees the Workforce Development

Board's layoff aversion fund and knew by the end of March the businesses needed help.

"So many of our businesses in Solano County have 10 or less employees and a lot of them feel alone," she said. "I went to (Henry) and said, 'we have to do something, we have to be able to help these businesses in some way.'"

"We put the whole grant program together in a week," Henry added. "We were one of the first two in the state to do this, along with LA County. They looked different but the concept was the same and we are very proud we were one of the first in the state to do it."

The program took off so quickly in Solano County that both Wells Fargo and Genentech volunteered to add funds, Ziomek-Portillo said. The city of Benicia also contributed money that went to businesses in their community.

Grants awarded ranged from \$500 to \$10,000 and were used to cover costs associated with teleworking, PPE equipment and software that helped businesses transition online.

"One thing that was huge is that we didn't put a lot of red tape in this," Ziomek-Portillo said. "We wanted the businesses to have the chance to tell us what they needed. We allowed them to come up with their plan of action and we funded applications as they came in. Our goal was to serve as many as we could."



***Almost overnight, we went from being a community secret to a valuable resource for a lot of small businesses.***

— TIM MURRILL

Altogether, 49 grants were awarded, totaling a little more than \$207,000 and saving 335 jobs in Solano County.

## Preparing for a Post-COVID-19 Future

As devastating as the past five months have been, one silver lining is that businesses are now more aware of the resources available to them through organizations like the Solano SBDC and Workforce Development Board.

The hope is the traction will only continue to grow.

More than 99 percent of businesses in Solano have fewer than 500 employees, qualifying them for the free SBDC services. The Workforce Development Board can assist businesses of any size.

"We are specialists of talent and we can help solve issues around talent, whether it's retention, retaining employees, development of job descriptions or data information about the local job market," Ziomek-Portillo said. "We really want to get it out to the masses and let people know we are here to help. I have grant funding available on a yearly basis, that's replenished every year to help businesses find their talent and retain their talent, and I have to say, it's definitely under-utilized."

Meanwhile, after months of consulting with clients on their SBA loans, the Solano SBDC is turning its attention to helping businesses prepare for a post-COVID future. Many of the free webinars and individual consulting sessions are focused on growing a business, marketing strategies, finance, sales and pivoting their business model amid the challenges of the pandemic.

In the fall, the SBDC will offer NxLevel, a 10-week intensive program designed to help businesses successfully move to the next level of growth. Participants will be in a cohort and develop their own business plans. There is a fee associated with NxLevel and pre-registration is required.

"It can be very difficult to plan and prepare for what's ahead when you don't know how long this is going to last and how bad it's going to get," Murrill said. "When you have your own business, you often feel very much alone and on an island. But we want our businesses to know they are not alone. We want to be beside them, every step of the way."

You can learn more about the Solano SBDC at [www.solanosbdc.org](http://www.solanosbdc.org) and the Workforce Development Board of Solano County at [solanoemployment.org](http://solanoemployment.org). ♦



The Solano SBDC is proud to offer NxLevel, a 10-week intensive program designed to help businesses successfully move to the next level of growth.

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# Spacious picnic grounds offer social distancing, views at Wooden Valley Winery

For three generations, family-owned Wooden Valley Winery has been producing award-winning wines from the Suisun Valley Appellation. Our history is rich in Solano County, and community has always been vital to the Lanza family.

In March 2020, we were challenged to make significant changes and create new ways to offer Lanza family hospitality. Guests would no longer be allowed to visit our establishment in the way they

were used to visiting. Fortunately, we were able to adapt and be flexible while maintaining our high standards of customer care. Much like Chick did in the 1960s, Ron took to delivering wine door to door to support our sheltered community. We were able to offer free delivery to our neighbors in Solano County and discounted shipping within California.

As the state-mandated guidelines changed, we adapted by returning to somewhat normal visitation. Guests can

now enjoy wine tasting and on-premise consumption in our outdoor tasting area. Thankfully, our spacious picnic grounds allow for ample social distancing while enjoying Suisun Valley's beautiful views.

Visitation is back to nearly normal, and we're thankful to our new and returning customers for continuing to spend their time at Wooden Valley Winery. ♦



Wooden Valley Winery in Suisun Valley has returned to somewhat normal visitation. Guests can enjoy wine tasting in the outdoor tasting area.





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DAILY REPUBLIC FILE PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** Homeless Intervention Team officer Joe Uchishiba holds the hand of an unidentified woman in Allan Witt Park while on patrol in 2015.

**RIGHT:** Fairfield Police Department Homeless Intervention Team patrol through a homeless encampment near Highway 12 in Fairfield in 2015.



# Help for the Homeless

## *Project Roomkey helps county's most vulnerable weather pandemic*

BY BRIANNA BOYD

**H**undreds of Solano County's homeless most at risk of contracting COVID-19 have had a roof over their heads, access to case workers, and health resources these past few months through a program area officials hope will help this vulnerable population find permanent and stable housing.

Nearly 250 motel rooms were made available throughout the county in June and July as part of the statewide Project Roomkey. People experiencing homelessness qualified for the program if they tested positive for COVID but did not require hospitalization, were being monitored for COVID symptoms, or were in a high-risk group due to age or pre-existing conditions.

Those who tested positive for the coronavirus were placed in rooms in Vallejo and Benicia. The remaining participants were in hotels in Vacaville and Fairfield. Fairfield had 50 rooms designated for the homeless. Rooms included couples and single mothers with children.

"It has been remarkable how the county has been participating in Project Roomkey, providing behavioral health and medical help, as well as offering resources and case managers on site to identify housing plans for individuals," said Brandon Wirth, the director of shelter services at Shelter Inc., which operates Shelter Solano in Fairfield. "It has also been a great partnership with Fairfield's (Homeless Intervention Team) as they have helped us to identify high risk individuals and provided the services to get them to the hotels."

The state funded Project Roomkey in June and July, and Shelter Inc. is now covering expenses for the program, Wirth said. The hope is additional funding will become



Nearly 250 motel rooms were made available throughout Solano County in June and July as part of the statewide Project Roomkey.

available so community partners "can continue providing services to help them overcome the barriers they are dealing with."

The state of homelessness in Fairfield and Solano County and the impact COVID has had on this group was the focus of a Fairfield-Suisun Chamber advocacy meeting July 29.

Shelter Inc's work within the community encompasses three key areas – preventing

homelessness, ending the cycle of homelessness and providing affordable housing. Shelter Solano on Beck Avenue has 32 beds available and new residents are brought in through coordinated entry with county services. Eighteen beds are designated for veterans but there are only nine staying there. Staff regularly works with police and county hospitals to identify potential clients.

For the Fairfield Police Department, homeless outreach in recent months has focused on the importance of finding a balance between providing access to services – whether that be behavioral, medical or resources – and addressing criminal activity.

About 10 years ago, the police department made a significant change to its approach to homelessness, Lt. Jausiah Jacobson said. The Homeless Intervention Team (HIT) was established and officers made a conscious effort to focus more on providing services and resources rather than arresting or issuing citations.

Providing those resources is still as vital as ever, but the department also has to address criminal activity, Jacobson said.

In response to concerns voiced by many of the businesses in downtown Fairfield, the city drafted and the council adopted

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in late July a new ordinance that prohibits sitting or lying down in doorways in downtown Fairfield between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.

The ordinance will only be enforceable if the owner, tenant or resident of the building has posted a sign at the entrance giving notice that such conduct is prohibited.

"A lot of businesses were having issues at night," Jacobson said. Complaints included littering, vandalism, indecent exposure and urinating on buildings and entrances. "The first three offenses are citations and the fourth is a misdemeanor and arrestable. We don't want it to be a situation where we just take someone to jail, we want this to be an opportunity where we can provide services. But if this becomes a habitual problem, we do have the ability to cite."

The city plans to monitor the impact of this ordinance and if it proves to be successful, it could be expanded into North Texas Street and West Texas Street business districts.

"If this influences someone to get help, to get services, that's great," Jacobson said. "We can't make them do it, it has to be their choice but if we can influence them to seek help, that's a win-win." ♦

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# Solano Small Business Loans

## EIDL Loans

EIDL loans information on specific companies has not been released by the Small Business Administration (SBA). The only data available is the aggregate number and amount of loans for California (as of July 15th).

- Total EIDL Loans in CA approved: 422,078
- Total amount of EIDL loans in CA: \$27.4 billion
- Total EIDL Advances in CA: 809, 792
- Total amount of Advances in CA: \$2.67 billion

## PPP Loans

SBA has released significantly more data on the PPP loans than the EIDL loans. There is detail about any PPP loan over the amount of \$150,000. For loans under \$150,000, the data does not include the business name. Below is data gleaned from the SBA information. SBA does not provide data on applications not funded.

- Awarded PPP Loans in Solano: 4,267; 3,195 were under

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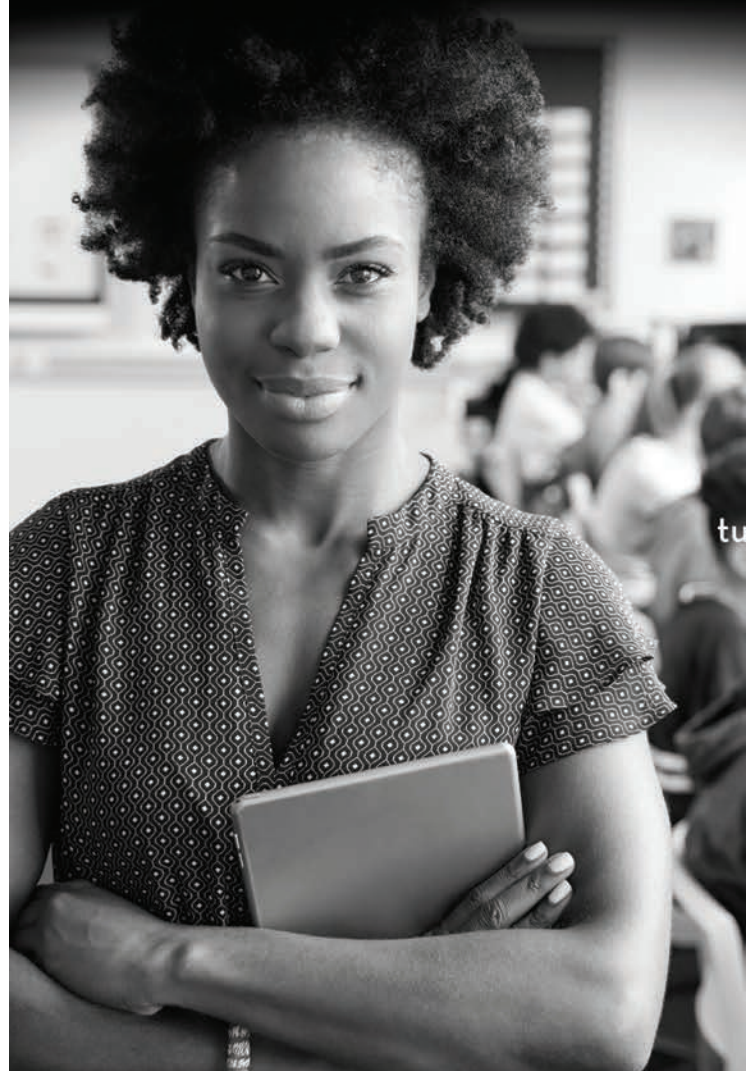
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\$150,000; 534 were over \$150,000.

- Total Loan Amount for loans under \$150,000: \$114.9 million.

- Of awards, 1,286 are individuals (independent contractors, self-employed, or sole proprietorships), 1,250 are corporations, 116 are non-profits.

- 41,538 jobs have been retained due to PPP loans in Solano.

Of the local banks, First Northern provided the highest number of successful PPP loans at 313.

SBDC confirms that 37 of the businesses they supported received SBA loans totaling \$3.7 million, and at least 12 have been turned down. Most of those turned down were due to not having been in business long enough, having bad credit or were already too leveraged.



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## Solano Small Business Grants

There have been six programs established, or in the process of being established, in the county to provide grants to small businesses.

- WDB's Layoff Aversion Fund (LOAF): 98 applications were received with a funding amount of \$818,157; 49 were awarded with a funding amount of \$202,278.

- City of Benicia Small Business Grant Program - \$200,000 – currently being awarded.

- Benicia Industrial Park Association - \$240,000.

- City of Fairfield CDBG – put out to RFP.

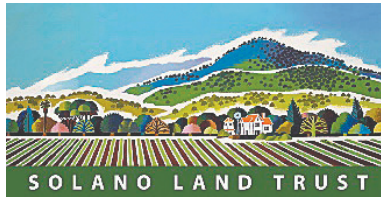
- Cities of Dixon and Vacaville CDBG – currently being developed.

- City of Fairfield CARES Act – \$200,000 - currently being negotiated with SBDC/WDB. ♦



# Solano Land Trust wants everyone to feel welcome

The Solano Land Trust has always believed it was essential to be in nature, but since the pandemic broke out we've had to live by that philosophy: The staff meetings, hikes, small receptions, and many ongoing projects are possible because of the warm sun and ventilation available on 12,000 acres of open public lands.



We closed properties to the public for a brief period, but we are delighted to see visitors of all ages back birdwatching, hiking and photographing wildlife, and getting a chance to observe recent and ongoing habitat restoration projects – like the bird boxes for the western bluebird monitoring program at Lynch Canyon Open Space Park, or the culvert built at Lower Spring Branch that allows water to flow through Suisun Marsh to uplands it hasn't reached in decades.

But protecting land doesn't make it accessible. Since COVID-19, this country has had a major lesson in how infrastructure determines what activities can happen. For adults in wheelchairs and adults who have limited mobility, this knowledge is nothing new; frequently

organizations with inclusive philosophies don't build inclusive infrastructure.

Before implementing a long-planned ADA project to expand paths around Rush Ranch, the Solano Land Trust worked with an accessibility

empowerment group of adults with disabilities to determine what design approaches to take and what materials to use.

The lessons learned from this build-out will help us realize goals to expand safe, navigable mobility trails at Jepson Prairie and other properties owned by Solano Land Trust.

But the bigger lesson came from taking honest feedback and from working at something deliberately and collaboratively to get it right. We believe land connects us all, but this can only occur if everyone feels welcome, and when the diversity of the community within these spaces better reflects the diversity in the county beyond it.

Going forth, we want to make sure everyone feels like this is their land trust, too. Visit our website to learn more about [solanolandtrust.org](http://solanolandtrust.org).

# WHAT MEMBERS SAY



"My name is Caryn Mikick and I am the owner of Stems Florist. During this pandemic I have been up and running the whole time. At the beginning of all of this it was very slow with everything being canceled, from proms and weddings to birthdays and funerals being put on hold. The world is changing around us at a rapid rate and in ways we never could have imagined. But through all of this one thing people haven't stopped doing is caring for one another. This is where Stems has continued to come into play. We still were able to deliver happiness through flowers. We have and continue to distance deliver to make our customers who live here or across country be able to tell their loved ones 'Happy Birthday,' 'Thinking of You' or even 'I'm sorry.' We have been able to make a bride's courthouse wedding just as special as her big venue wedding. Flowers just make people happy. And any business that can be safe and make people happy is essential during this time."

**CARYN MIKICK**  
STEMS FLORIST

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- Housekeeping
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### Assisted Living

- Residents maintain their dignity while aging
- Assistance with everyday tasks, like bathing, dressing and meals or medication management
- Trained staff available and monitoring 24 hours a day
- Scheduled transportation to doctor appointments
- Activities & Excursions
- Housekeeping
- Laundry

### Memory Care

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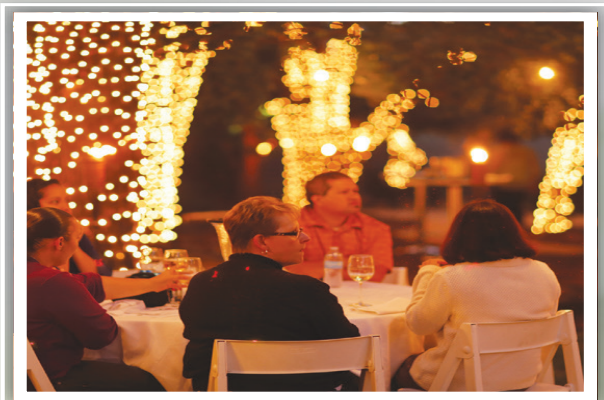


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