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Local businesses bounce back

Kat Olson and Meg Manger at Cohost in east downtown Stanwood in June.



MARY JENNINGS / FOR THE STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

As economy reopens from pandemic, area shops welcome return to normal

By MARY JENNINGS
For the Stanwood Camano News

The pandemic affected every Stanwood-Camano business, but those that relied on gathering in-person were hit especially hard. Many adapted and learned

new skills to confront the ever-changing challenges surrounding COVID-19.

Now, as the state prepares to fully reopen June 30, most local businesses appear to have weathered the storm, even though small businesses accounted for the

majority of the estimated 200,000 businesses that failed nationwide as a result of the pandemic, according to a recent report by the Federal Reserve.

In the Stanwood and Camano area, community support helped numerous small businesses not only keep their doors open but thrive.

■ SEE BUSINESS, A8

A hot spot for art

Island artists welcome visitors during return of popular Camano Studio Tour



PEGGY WENDEL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

A visitor talks with Camano artist John Hadley, right, on Saturday during the Camano Studio Tour.

By PEGGY WENDEL
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Artists all along this year's modified Camano Studio Tour said they were surprised by the crowds over an extremely hot weekend. Some artists said they had their best

day ever on Friday. People continued to visit Saturday and Sunday, but crowds thinned as temperatures increased.

"Normally, Saturday is our busiest day," said gallery owner Karla Matzke, who helped start this popular art event in 1999 when three galleries and a handful of studios organized shows as one event.

"People are wanting to get out, and artists are wanting to show their work," said Mary Simmons, tour director for 12 years.

The Camano Studio Tour draws people from all over. It gives people an opportunity to meet the artists and see the work in the environment where it was created.

Because of the intimate nature of bringing people from near and far into homes, studios and galleries, the tour was canceled in 2020. This year, the Camano Arts Association considered canceling again before pushing ahead.

■ SEE ART, A7

Almost time to get cracking

Crabbing season opens Thursday

By EVAN CALDWELL
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Boatloads of crabbers hope to light the fuse on the long Fourth of July weekend by hitting the water when the season officially opens Thursday, July 1.

"We expect good crabbing this year in several areas of Puget Sound," state Department of Fish and Wildlife crustacean biologist Don Velasquez said. "Still, some areas with continued low abundance will have a limited season or remain closed this year to promote population growth."

Summer crabbing season in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 around Stanwood and Camano Island, and most other areas, will be open Thursdays through



EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

People can get their claws on crab starting Thursday.

Mondays each week through Sept. 6. However, no sport crab fisheries will be open Tuesdays or Wednesdays. All shellfish gear must be removed from the water on closed days.

The daily limit throughout Puget Sound is five Dungeness

crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6 1/4 inches. People may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, measuring at least 5 inches across.

■ SEE CRAB, A5

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Burn ban now in effect for SnoCo and ban starts June 30 on Camano

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Hot weather to stick around a while

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Business

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"When storefront businesses began to reopen after the initial shutdown, people got out and started shopping and taking advantage of services," Jessica McCready, executive director of the Camano Chamber of Commerce, said. "That support has continued on a very positive trajectory."

A virtual presence

Movement Arts yoga and Pilates studio owner Carol Mason realized when exercise classes were suspended that she needed to pivot fast.

"I knew early on in March of last year that if I wanted to keep the studio open, I had to figure how to do my classes virtually," said Mason, who bought the established business in January 2020. "I'd never even used Zoom, so it was all a bit intimidating."

Mason leaned on tech-savvy family members for help setting up livestream classes and improving the business' website.

Mason said she was grateful for patient patrons who stuck with her.

As soon as classes started streaming, yoga students Greg Bloom and Marianne McGarry-Bloom of Camano Island were all in.

"Greg has had two strokes, and yoga has been essential in his recovery," McGarry-Bloom said.

Mason now offers a hybrid of in-person and virtual classes, and many want this model to be permanent.

"Some students find it more comfortable and convenient to do a livestream class from home or do a recorded session that I post to our website," she said. However, more people also are returning to the studio.

A recent national survey showed most consumers will return to in-person classes,



PHOTOS BY EVAN CALDWELL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Yoga instructor Carol Mason leads a class at Movement Arts on Camano Island as streaming equipment (center) reaches more clients.

but demand for online classes remains strong. Virtual classes are up 25% from 2019, according to fitness research firm ClubIntel.

Mason feels fortunate that her business survived such trying times and wants to give back.

"During the summer, I will again be holding monthly free outdoor yoga classes, usually on the green at Terry's Corner, and I ask that those who attend to bring a donation to the food bank," she said. "In June, we had a special outdoor class at the old orchard area at Barnum Point County Park. For this one, everyone made generous donations to CASA."

Economic optimism

When Jessie Tanner returned to Stanwood after pursuing his stylist career in Las Vegas and Hollywood, he decided that his hometown was ready for something new and different.

It was with this creative entrepreneurial spirit that Tanner opened the Beauty Bar Salon + Lounge, a combination full-service salon and cocktail lounge, at 10011 270th St. NW, Stanwood.

Tanner had barely opened his doors when COVID-19 restrictions brought the so-



Jessie Tanner cuts hair in his Beauty Bar Salon + Lounge in Stanwood in June.

cial part of business to a halt.

"It's definitely been a tough time, but the community has just been so supportive and encouraging of what I'm doing here," he said.

Tanner managed to keep his doors open during the pandemic and feels positive about the future.

He is not alone in his entrepreneurial optimism.

Nationally, new business applications surged 24% in 2020 and remain at a much higher level than prior to the pandemic, according to research by the Economic Innovation Group, a bipartisan public policy organization.

Many entrepreneurs said they had more time to think about new ventures and that emerging from the pandemic

had renewed their sense of confidence.

Washington's robust economic outlook is also buoying entrepreneurial spirits.

Recent projections by the state Economic and Revenue Forecast Council indicate the economy will come roaring back, with revenue projections for the 2021-23 general fund increasing by nearly \$1.8 billion.

"The budget passed in the spring is clearly sustainable for the coming years," state Office of Financial Management Director David Schumacher said in a news release last week. "Thanks to the resilience of our economy, we can continue to invest in the people of Washington as we emerge from this pandemic."

The strong economic outlook and lessening of gathering restrictions is a confidence boost to business owners such as Tanner.

"I want this to be a safe space where anyone can come in for a salon service and then stay for a glass of wine and maybe some karaoke," he said. "After over a year of people being stuck at home, we want this to be a totally fun and innovative experience for the Stanwood area."

Tanner also has big plans for his space that include pool tables, dart boards, regular cabaret shows and dancing on the weekends.

"Everybody is just so ready to have a good time," he said.

Ready to gather

Kat Olson opened Cohost in September 2019 in east downtown Stanwood, and her community event space was just beginning to hit its stride when the pandemic

shut things down.

"We had hosted a variety of workshops including cheese making and cupcake decorating," she said. "We also had instructors teaching weekly yoga classes and a local preschool used our space for their classroom. We were starting to see people use the coworking office space too."

Olson also had a space for local craft vendors to sell their wares.

"Prior to COVID, we had events like the Holiday Makers Market where our vendors hosted their booths ready to connect with the public," Olson said. "These events were such a great way for shoppers to meet local creators, who make everything from chocolates to jewelry. Customers could not only buy amazing products, but they could also support the local economy."

Olson adapted her business model quickly when conditions changed.

"I knew I had to keep the Maker's Market going because it was so successful," she said. "I encouraged everyone to keep making their products and instead of the vendors being physically present in Cohost, I became the conduit to connect shoppers with any questions they had about the products."

Jewelry and pottery vendor Meg Manger is thankful that Olson was flexible enough to keep her doors open.

"Having the Cohost Makers Market is very important to local artisans," she said. "Kat worked incredibly hard to support us and we are thankful."

Judy Williams, president of the Stanwood Chamber of Commerce, is proud of how determined local merchants have been.

"From curbside pickup to utilizing social media, our business people have been so innovative and steadfast in providing goods and services to the community," she said. "It's definitely been a tough time and our business community deserves high praise for hanging in there."

Olson is definitely eager about getting back to using her space for events and classes.

Coming up in July: grilling classes and a charcuterie board workshop.

Fun and games

Game Night is back at Journey's End Café, next door to the Elger Bay Grocery on Camano Island.

Employee Dawson D'atre, who facilitates this weekly event, said attendance was a bit sparse when Open Game Night returned at the end of May.

"It took a few weeks for word to get about, but we've definitely been getting more people in," he said. "Everyone just seems really happy to be able to socialize again."

Nearly half of all Americans have received at least

one vaccine dose, and COVID-19 case counts have fallen to their lowest level in months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Washington, nearly 70% have gotten at least one shot of a vaccine.

Some masking and social distancing restrictions still apply, especially for the unvaccinated and in the health care sector, but for activities like shopping and attending gatherings, the CDC has given the green light to a return to normal activities.

Journey's End Café is counting on more people wanting to hang out.

"Open Game Night is on Mondays, and we have lots of board games available to play in the café or people can bring their own," D'atre said.

Holly Harbrige of Camano Island was happy to find a local activity for her family.

"We just love coming here for Game Night," she said. "We moved here last year, and this has been a great way finally to get out and meet people."

D'atre said the popular Magic the Gathering nights are back on too.

"Wednesdays are for those new to Magic and Thursdays are for more advanced players," he said. "We have Magic tournaments every Friday night."

Just the beginning

It hasn't been clear sailing for all summer activities.

Much-loved large events such as the Twin City Idlers Classic Car Show, the Summer Arts Jam and the Stanwood-Camano Fair have all been canceled.

Officials decided that the pandemic created too much uncertainty when the planning would have had to begin, so they delayed until 2022.

Gov. Jay Inslee recently confirmed plans for a statewide reopening on June 30.

"What we know now gives us the confidence to close this chapter in this pandemic and begin another," Inslee said at a news conference on June 24. "This next part of our fight to save lives in Washington will focus on increasing vaccination rates and continuing to monitor variants of concern as we move toward reopening our state."

Overall, local entrepreneurs remain optimistic about the future.

Cohost owner Olson has only recently felt like she can take a moment and appreciate all that has happened.

"I'm so grateful for the community support received during these hard times," she said. "I'm hopeful that everyone realizes that all small businesses still need the support of people shopping and doing activities locally."




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