

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

More than buying local: Businesses helping businesses



Bon McVicar and Christine Gilland sponsored the patio fee for The Cask & Kettle Irish Gastropub, owned by Shawn Verner and Mike McPartland.

Photo: Emma McPhee/Telegraph-Journal



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Emma McPhee | Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • When Bob McVicar and Christine Gilliland decided to support local as a way to help small businesses struggling during COVID-19, they did so in a big way.

Both small business owners themselves, the two took it upon themselves to step up and pay the summer patio fee for the Cask & Kettle Irish Gastropub.

"Our businesses weren't affected all that much [by COVID-19]," said Gilliland, owner of Way Up Strategic Solutions, who thought up the idea. "But then I got thinking about what if we hadn't been working for all that time? How much money would we have lost? How terrible would it be?"

"I thought, 'Okay, there's one thing to support local. And then there's another thing to try to make up for lost time.'"

Gilliland approached McVicar, managing broker at Sutton Group Realty, with her idea, and "adopt a patio" was born.

"It was such a great gesture, and that they thought of us for it was really moving," said Shawn Verner, owner and operator of the Cask & Kettle. "It wasn't even about the money for us; it was just the gesture itself that means everything to us."

In the best of times, Verner said restaurants operate with very slim margins of three to five per cent. With COVID-19 shutting down the restaurant for about a month, and then relying on take-out only for a while after that, Verner said finances were tight. McVicar and Gilliland's gesture came at a time when every dime counted, he said.

"I found it really humbling," said Mike McPartland, Verner's business partner. "It was very heartfelt."

Verner said he and McPartland are already thinking about ways they can pay it forward.

"We were going to reach out to the city and see what can we do Uptown to help," Verner said. "Uptown Saint John has really built up over the last few years. You'd hate to lose the momentum that was going."

Gilliland said she and McVicar are hoping they will lead by example, and other people with the means to do so will step up and help others that are struggling.

"What if somebody approached a hairdresser's chair or paid their permit fee or did whatever; there's all kinds of neat ways people can help," she said.

"We had the capacity to help in ways that were bigger than just shopping local and buying local," McVicar said. "It's easy to say 'I'm going to eat at a restaurant. I'm going to get a haircut.' But for people who can and are really committed to the neighbourhood, if you could take that extra step."