

Aurora Chamber of Commerce: Business Matters

By Sandra Ferri President & CEO, Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Happy New Year from all of us at the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

I don't think any of us was expecting to start 2022 with more COVID restrictions in place, and, like all of us, I'm finding it difficult to see our local businesses being asked to shut down or limit their capacity once again. After 21 months, one wonders if there is an appreciation or true understanding of the impact these restrictions have on small business. We have asked our small businesses to sacrifice time and again to ensure the safety of our community, but their survival has never been at greater risk than today.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce, as a member of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, supports the recent OCC comments:

"We implore the government to immediately clarify if Ontario will be moving out of Stage 2 of its Roadmap to Reopen plan so employers, workers and families can plan accordingly. To help reduce business uncertainty, we continue to call for transparency and visibility into the metrics guiding the imposition or removal of public health restrictions.

"Businesses, particularly small businesses, have suffered greatly over the last two years and continue to face unprecedented challenges amid a prolonged crisis. We ask the Government of Ontario to develop a clear and consistent long-term plan for managing the pandemic that ties restrictions to data-based metrics and provide employers with the necessary guidance around reopening when it is safe to do so." (Rocco Rossi, President & CEO Ontario Chamber of Commerce January 13/22)

The Aurora Chamber advocated on behalf of businesses to secure financial supports during the first pandemic outbreak, to even the playing field for all businesses big or small and we continue to advocate to improve government communication with businesses and for continued financial supports for businesses that are impacted by new and/or continued lockdown measures.

The Ontario Government recently announced a \$10,000 grant payment for eligible small businesses that include restaurants and bars; indoor sports and recreational fitness activities; racing venues, casinos, bingo halls and gaming establishments; meeting or event spaces; tour and guide services; performing arts venues and cinemas; museums, galleries, aquariums, zoos, science centres, landmarks, historic sites, and botanical gardens; conference centres and convention centres; driving instruction for individuals; and before and after school programs.

Eligible businesses that qualified for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and that are subject to closure under modified Step Two of the Roadmap to Reopen will be pre-screened to verify eligibility and will not need to apply to the new program. Newly established and newly eligible small businesses will need to apply once the application portal opens in the coming weeks. Small businesses that qualify can expect to receive their payment in February.

The Ontario Business Costs Rebate Program opened on January 18. Under the Rebate Program, eligible businesses required to close for indoor activities, such as restaurants and gyms, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 100 per cent of their costs. Those required to reduce capacity to 50 per cent, such as smaller retail stores, will receive a rebate payment equivalent to 50 per cent of their costs.

More information on Ontario supports can be found at:
news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001399/ontario-providing-supports-for-small-businesses-workers-and-families.

The Federal Government recently extended the repayment deadline for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) until December 31, 2023.

The priority for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce is to assist businesses during these challenging times and we have provided tools

that are necessary to support and allow small business to survive, these tools include:

The Accelerate Business Recovery Virtual Hub: - A virtual hub designed to support small business owners and managers can be found at www.acceleratebusinessrecover.ca and includes:

Skill building videos curated by York University's Schulich Executive Education Centre in the areas of digital marketing, financial planning, and strategic planning, all available on the Virtual Hub. - Certificate in Business Essentials course offered by York University's Schulich Executive Education Centre, open to any business that has suffered a revenue loss during the pandemic. - One-on-one coaching for struggling businesses ? up to 10 hours of free coaching with a subject matter expert in their area of need. Areas may include but are not limited to Digital Marketing, Strategic Planning and Financial Planning. - Lunch and Learn sessions with the Expert ? kicking off this month with 4 Digital Marketing sessions, followed by 4 Content Development sessions and 4 Human Resources sessions.- Check out all these resources by logging into the hub at www.acceleratebusinessrecovery.ca. **Explore Aurora:**

The Chamber ran an enhanced Explore Aurora Shop Local campaign over the past five months that included:

The Explore Aurora and Win Holiday Contest ? Congratulations to our two winners Patricia Wallace and Nadia Okolowsky ? who each won a \$500 prize package that included a one-night stay at local hotel and \$100 to spend at each of three local businesses in the Eat, Play, Shop categories. Thank you to our sponsors Microtel Inn & Suites, Holiday Inn Express & Suites and Addison Marketing Solutions who purchased the gift cards to our local businesses. Thank you also to New Roads Toyota Aurora who sponsored the overall 2021 Explore Aurora Campaign. Through this campaign we created business spotlights for over 75 businesses, created banners for the downtown core, newspaper and radio ads and a high performing social media campaign. The Show us Your Love for Aurora Contest launched this week, where once again the spotlight will be on our local businesses and where we will be asking you, the consumer, to tag a local business and tell us why you love them. You can enter the contest by going to www.exploreaurora.ca and filling in the ballot.- Over 50 spotlight videos of local businesses, restaurants, services and charities can be found on the Local Spotlight tab of Explore Aurora. We will continue to add businesses to this tab, so check back often.

I hope you will continue to read the Chamber's column where we will discuss issues that are relevant and critical to our local economy, and we will update the community on the concerns and successes of Aurora businesses in this monthly column as the pandemic has changed not only our business community but all our lives.

My wish for everyone is that 2022 brings health and prosperity.