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NEW BAR-BUSINESS OWNERS HANDLE COVID-19 LIMITATIONS

January 13, 2021

By Heather Rule

The COVID-19 pandemic threw bars and restaurants a curveball. But with the help of takeout options, and loyal support from local customers, three establishments in Battle Lake managed the changes last summer.

The Rusty Nail

Zachary and Brianna Lewis took over the Rusty Nail on Jan. 1, 2020, and business boomed. The bar serves handcrafted cocktails, 24 tap beers and a variety of delicious burgers. COVID-19 forced them to close right before St. Patrick's Day, canceling the party and band they had planned. But they didn't miss a beat and kept busy making to-go orders during the shutdown. They limited their menu slightly – “we just didn't do nachos and things that just go bad in a Styrofoam box after a 20-minute drive” – but still prepared most appetizers and all the burgers, Brianna said.

It was takeout-only until the Governor's order allowed restaurants to open at 50 percent capacity on June 10. Then the Rusty Nail opened with 11 indoor and 8 outdoor patio tables. They were still “insanely busy” throughout the summer, Brianna said, and they've also sold gift cards like crazy.

“Everyone's support is just insane,” Brianna said. They had a lot of regulars come back, and they brought their visitors – people from all over the area, Brianna said.

ABC Brewing

Greg Smedsrud and a few others started a brewery in 2017 in Ashby. Then they decided to open up a brewery in Battle Lake, so they took over the old Oasis restaurant building on Highway 210 and turned it into ABC Brewing, opening for business March 16, 2020.

It was open just one day before COVID-19 shut things down. The pandemic also delayed the arrival of brewing equipment which didn't show up until mid-summer.

In the meantime, ABC Brewing turned to pizza. It brought in a hand-built, pizza oven from Napa, California. The brewery offered pizzas and beer for takeout starting in mid-May. Originally, takeout was not part of the plan, but being able to sell beer was a big factor in their financial abilities, Smedsrud said. “So, COVID forced us to do takeout, and now we've got a pretty good business in takeout” besides the inside, onsite dining, Smedsrud said.

With the business already established in Ashby, the new location in Battle Lake received “overwhelming community support,” Smedsrud said. “We’re really doing this to be able to promote the tourism of these small communities.”

Stella’s Bistro and Wine Bar

Co-owner Ryan Carlson knew Stella’s Bistro and Wine Bar needed more outdoor seating besides the patio out front. With the arrival of COVID-19 and decreased indoor capacity, a 30-by-60-foot deck was built in May to prepare for a busy summer.

Stella’s only shut down for a day or two before switching to takeout-only when the pandemic halted businesses in March. They later opened at partial capacity as restrictions allowed. Carlson saw people come up to their cabins earlier than usual. They served a lot more takeout than normal, he added. “But when you put the takeout and the dine-in together,” Carlson said summer business has been similar to other years, “which is very, very fortunate in Battle Lake.”

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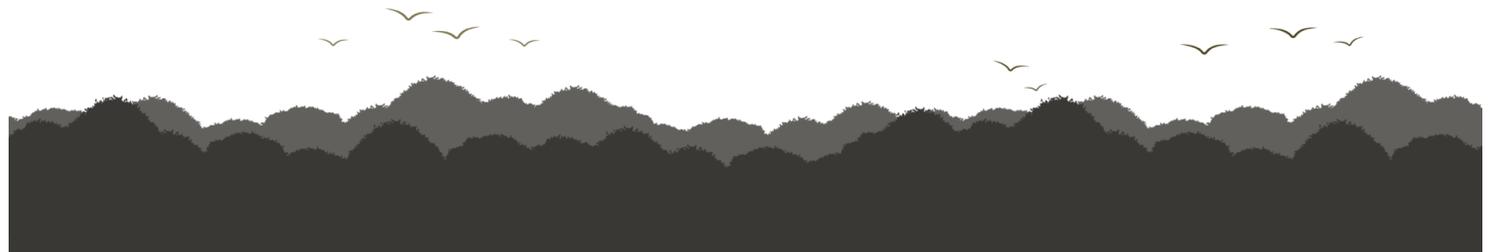
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