

# Local businesses are adapting to the new reality of the coronavirus. Here's how

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Alewerks Brewing Company and other businesses in the area have had to find creative solutions to keep their businesses operating. (WYDaily/Courtesy Alewerks)

While the coronavirus (COVID-19) closes the doors of many businesses across the country, businesses in the area are coming up with creative solutions to move forward.

“This is a new reality and adapting is the name of the game,” said Michael Claar, director of operations for Alewerks Brewing Company. “It feels like we are working in a different place than we were two weeks ago.”

Last week, Gov. Ralph Northam urged restaurants and bars to limit their guests to 10 patrons at a time. On Monday, the governor ordered all recreation and entertainment venues and personal care facilities that cannot adhere to social distancing to close restricted restaurants to carry-out, curbside or delivery only.

At Alewerks, staff have switched to a curbside pickup and delivery operation. The brewery allows customers to order online and has been using its staff of 32 to deliver to the area. Eventually, Claar said the delivery operations will expand to Richmond and Newport News and, depending on how long the coronavirus keeps businesses closed, possibly throughout the state.

Alewerks sells beers in grocery stores and other locations in Virginia but Claar said closing the brewery has been a hit in draft beer sales, which were a large part of the business' revenue. While the delivery and curbside pickup options don't make up for the revenue lost during this time, it does allow for the business to cover paying its staff for the most part.

The business has come up with additional solutions to make sure staff remain paid. Last week, Alewerks offered empty oak barrels for sale that were used to age beer. The sale helped raise a few thousand dollars, all of which Claar said will be going to employee paychecks to cover hours that have been cut.

"Everyday, every few hours, we have to think 'okay what're we going to overcome today,'" he said. "We have to think of ways to keep everyone as close to where they were before reality changed."

Similarly, the restaurant Cochon on 2nd has also changed to delivery and curbside service as a way to keep the 18 people on its staff.

"We went from a white tablecloth restaurant to a factory and did it in a matter of four days," said Neil Griggs, chef and owner of Cochon.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Griggs had been preparing to open Moody's Kitchen on Merrimac Trail, which was designed to serve quick meals where people could come in and buy prepared food. The opening of the business has been delayed because inspectors can no longer come onto the site.

So, instead Moody's Kitchen has temporarily been re-branded as Cochon at Home. The setup was already predisposed for quick service, Griggs said.

The business is also delivering to neighborhoods throughout the area and offering deals on gift certificates that people can cash-in on at a later date.

But even with the new operations, Griggs said the business is only earning a third of its regular revenue, which is just enough to keep the staff paid. He can operate with the loss of revenue for only about three months and he hopes a federal stimulus package will come to help the restaurant industry before then.

Other industries are facing the change in business as well.

The local retail shops Three Sisters and Three Cabanas have shut their doors and reduced their staff from 11 part-time and full-time employees to just one full-time manager, said owner Kelly Terracina.

The stores have moved their operations online and are trying to reach customers through social media platforms.

"It's just a totally different animal," she said. "In our stores, it's about the experience and the relationship with the customers so we are trying to provide that styling and feedback through our websites."

The stores have even started doing daily "try-on" videos where the store manager tries on different clothing items to show how they fit on different body types and can be paired with other items in the store. Terracina said the videos take hours to produce each day but they're necessary to provide that interactive experience that's no longer available.

The stores are also now providing delivery and curbside pick up for orders, but even with those creative solutions Terracina said she's only bringing in about 10 percent of her normal revenue.

While Three Cabanas was included as part of a rent waiver from Colonial Williamsburg to Merchant's Square tenants last week, the Three Sisters location still has to figure out how to pay its upcoming rent.

That's in addition to figuring out how to pay her vendors, her taxes and the other expenses that come with the stores.

But most important, Terracina said, is paying her one remaining employee. While many of her store employees had to leave because they were students at William & Mary, her one full-time manager still relies on her salary from the stores to survive.

"We can't let her go," she said. "As a business owner, people rely on you and I would dip into my personal funds if I needed to."

Moving forward, these businesses are continuing to look at ways in which they can bring in more revenue and survive these trying times. But while it remains unclear when their business can again open, they're finding support and kindness from the community.

"I think this has been a humbling experience," Griggs said. "There is no better town than Williamsburg to operate in because it's so incredibly supportive. There's a lot of heroes here."