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Gilmanton's Own pivots and succeeds

By ADAM DRAPCHO, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN
Jul 20, 2020

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a colorful patterned face mask and a pink t-shirt. She is holding a large bunch of leafy green vegetables and a bag of groceries. In the background, there is a red building with a large window displaying various notices. Overlaid on the bottom right of the image is a red advertisement for HP. The ad features the text 'Ad Save up to 25% when you upgrade to HP high-capacity cartridges' and a 'SHOP NOW' button. There is also a small image of a woman using a printer and a close button (X) in the top right corner of the ad.

GILMANTON — When it became clear that 2020 would be a year of social distancing and anxieties over such mundane tasks as going to a market, the Gilmanton's Own organization of farmers and artisans decided to rewrite their playbook for this summer. Instead of selling local products through a volunteer-staffed storefront, they offered their goods through a website with curbside pickup.

“For now, it seems to be working really well for us, for many different reasons,” said Sarah Baldwin-Welcome, president of Gilmanton's Own board of directors. “What we've found through all of this, we've doubled our revenues in some weeks through the online market, versus if we were to go back to the in-person market, we would lose some of our sales through the social distancing.”

For the previous two years, Gilmanton's Own members brought their products to a storefront in the hopes that they would sell. This summer, they are simply listing their offerings on the Gilmanton's Own website. Consumers can shop from the safety and convenience of their own home, pay for their items through the website, and then select one of two pickup windows – either a Saturday or Thursday – when they just park their vehicle, pop their trunk, and a volunteer loads their purchases.



The system was designed for the safety and comfort of consumers, but Baldwin-Welcome said there are benefits for the vendors as well. The many quiches or pounds of kale have sold, rather than sitting on the market shelves.

“Because we know how many have sold, it's better,” Baldwin-Welcome said.

An advertisement for HP featuring a woman in a red and white plaid shirt standing next to a large HP printer. A prominent red overlay on the left side of the image contains white text: "Ad Save up to 25% when you upgrade to HP high-capacity cartridges". At the bottom of the red overlay is a white button that says "SHOP NOW" and the HP logo. There are also small "X" icons in the top right and bottom right corners of the image area.



The biggest increase in sales has been in the area of prepared foods, which are made from local ingredients, Baldwin-Welcome said.

Meg Nighswander is part of that trend. Nighswander has been a patron of Gilmanton's Own since it launched in 2017, she said. "I've always liked the produce and the artwork, this year with the virus, you can't go to a restaurant, so I get the prepared meals. It's like having a private chef once a week, it really lightens your mood not having to cook every night of the week."

Nighswander lives in Gilmanton. Baldwin-Welcome said the growth in sales has been both from local, loyal customers who are increasing their orders, as well as new faces who are driving from as far as Alton or Meredith to pick up their orders.

"We are absolutely seeing new customers as the word gets out," Baldwin-Welcome said. She added that one of the positive outcomes of the coronavirus pandemic seems to be a growing sentiment that a local, simple food supply chain is preferable. She cheers that development, whether or not it benefits Gilmanton's Own.

"We encourage people to be their own farmers. We want people to know where their food comes from," Baldwin-Welcome said. "Go support our local farmers."

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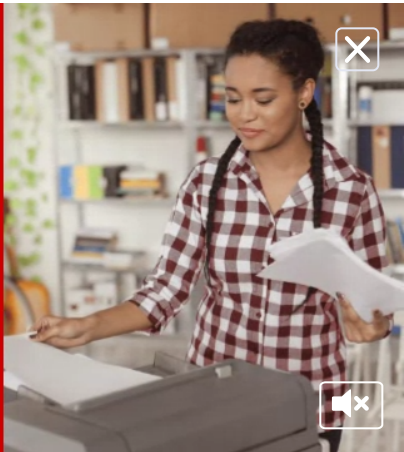
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