

Lewiston community hopeful worst of weather, COVID is behind us

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February being more in the dead of winter. That was really the first thing of the year in the village that had any real effect to it. So, the thinking was that people might be antsy to get out a little bit, and to have some wine and chocolates at different places – the ‘Sip/Shop’-type thing – and then come out for dinner near Valentine’s Day time. Not necessarily Valentine’s dinner, but it might be Valentine’s shopping-type thing. It was very popular.”

Here’s how it works: Participants “Sip” and “Shop” from 1-5 p.m., and “Eat,” well, whenever they’re hungry!

They collect a punch card at designated gold star balloon businesses; stop into any of the participating sites along Center Street, which will be marked with star balloons (red – “Sip” and “Shop”; blue – “Sip” and “Eat”); take a look around to see what’s inside, and get the punch card punched. No purchase is necessary – but purchases are always appreciated.

When a punch card has all 10 spots checked, the cardholder can enter to win a prize package by dropping the completed ticket at any of the participating restaurants.

“Sip. Shop. Eat!” is a product of the Lewiston Business Group, a Chamber of Com-

merce subgroup.

“I’m hoping there’s a good turnout,” Barber said. With COVID-19 infection rates dropping daily, “I really think that people want to get back out. We’d be looking forward to people coming out to support that event.”

Tough Two Years

2020 and 2021 were a rollercoaster of openings ... closings ... emotions.

Matt Villnave, who opened Trait-Carré on Center Street last November, initially saw one unfortunate, unexpected side effect of the prolonged pandemic.

“The problem I was having in the fall was getting products in,” he said. “There were long lead times. ... It wasn’t even like people didn’t have soap; it was the glass. Like candles, for example. Many of them are in like glass vessels. There was a glass shortage.

“The supply chain issues were the biggest issue for me. And being a new business owner, I’m struggling just to know how much to order and all that to begin with. So, you’re going into what is the busiest shopping season with limited inventory.”

For Bechara Cobti, owner of Syros Restaurant on Cayuga Street, the key to keeping the doors open was becoming a one-man band.

“I’m here covering for a lot of people. We’re short on people



Brewed and Bottled Craft Beer Shop was a popular stop at the first “Sip. Shop. Eat!” The beeratorium recently reopened at 444 Center St. (File photo)

like everybody else,” he said. “You hear it every day: Everybody’s short. So, I’m here every day. I have to cover for everybody. If somebody doesn’t feel good ... I’ve got to cover.”

“That’s how I rode it out. By me covering,” Cobti added. “And my family helped, too. And I had a few people I can depend on.”

Barber said local business owners are “battered and bruised, but also encouraged.

“I think that COVID, as you know, has had its highs or lows. We start to loosen; we get more restrictive. So, most businesses, I think, are battered, bruised and exhausted, and are looking for the light at the end of the tunnel.

“But I feel like a double-whammy, if you talk about this two-year journey, I think this has been one of the hardest winters that we’ve had in a significant amount of time. So not only did we see at Christmas, New Year’s time, the surge in COVID and people’s hesitation to come out, we also saw such a tough, harsh winter – and that really impacts all these businesses.

“Winter is tough in general. But when we’ve had so much snow and extreme cold, it’s been very hard to keep the businesses going and stay encouraged.”

Which brings us back to “Sip. Shop. Eat!”

Hope is For Better Days Ahead

“I do think they see the warmer weather, COVID is loosening up, and they’re excited to know things are coming back,” Barber said. “Events are in motion for planning for 2022 across the board. And I think that that is a motivation and encouragement to stick this through, because it’s been quite a journey.”

Villnave said his store is “completely stocked, because supply chains have gotten better, people are getting what they need to make the products. My store is filled.”

Some of the new products at Trait-Carré include made-in-Lewiston Eutierria Candle Co. candles, and skincare products from Gypsy Meadows Market of East Aurora.

“We have a lot of new candle selections and wax melts; over 85 soaps at this point; and a lot of bath accessories I’ve added,” Villnave said.

Cobti said, “When Lent starts, people think spring. That’s what they think. And more people go out. Even takeout. More takeout, too. Takeout, people pick up, delivery with DoorDash.”

He said he’s looking forward to “Sip. Shop. Eat!”

“We’ll be ready,” Cobti said.

Mayor Anne Welch said, “2020-2021 were long and unpredictable years. No one could imagine the spread of a pandemic and the devastation it would cause. Everyone suffered the effects of it – from families, schools, churches, businesses, organizations, events and every walk of life. But through it

all, we saw people coming together, helping each other through this tough time. The residents checked on their neighbors, supported the local businesses, and adapted to this new way of life of health and safety restrictions. Without their support, our village would look a lot different coming out of this pandemic. All our businesses had to adjust to the NYS restrictions and requirements, and reinvent their way of doing business.

“In spite of COVID, businesses not only survived but flourished. The Frontier House is being restored, the rear building at the Eighth and Center Street plaza is nearing completion, and Tim Hortons and Quest are open. The newly relocated Gallo Coal Fire Pizza and Gallo Pronto at Fourth and Center Street is open, and the Brickyard and the BBC is remodeled and up and running after its devastating fire. The new building at 444 Center St., is now home to Alfonso Bax Esq., Battle Flag Tavern, Brewed & Bottled, Sgt. Peppers and the Mad Hatter’s Tea House. There has also been recent renovations of the retail shops/apartments at 555 Center St., Coppins Service Station at 550 Center St., and Colonial Valley Plaza at 791 Center St.

“We did what we could to help the businesses and residents during the pandemic. We lowered municipal rents and waived fees for businesses and residents during COVID. We also allowed sandwich board signs for curbside pickup, and dropped off road cones to designate the pickup parking spaces, which was very successful and helped to keep our restaurants going. Residents and visitors were glad to be able to call in their menu orders and pick them up at the curb without worry and contact.

“I am glad to report that more new businesses have opened in the village. Everyone went the extra step – and this says a lot about our village. The locals shopped local and supported the businesses and, without them, it would have been a different story. We are lucky to have such a supportive and caring community.

“I’m looking forward to our bicentennial celebration and to the many events and festivals that are back on schedule this year. I am saddened by the loss of loved ones and the families affected by this pandemic, but I am looking forward to a brighter future this year.”

For more information on “Sip. Shop. Eat!” visit <https://www.facebook.com/LewistonBusinessGroup>.

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