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Work increases for local retailers as doors open

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By Chris Drost

It took a lot of preparation and expense for local retailers to be ready to re-open their doors for in-store foot traffic on May 19. This is the word from four local retailers contacted by The Bancroft Times a week into being open for business.Sue Weir, owner of Zihua Boutique on Bridge St. says ?it has been lots of work getting everything in place and lots of work cleaning after each person has been in the store.? Weir is currently allowing customers by appointment only and a maximum of three in the shop at any one time. She has gone to great lengths to ensure physical distancing and developing procedures to reduce touch spots in the store. After a person tries on a piece of clothing it is steam cleaned and set aside for 72 hours before being put back on the floor. The change room is being cleaned after each person. At this point, Weir is not accepting any returns of merchandise.?People are coming by appointment, mostly regular customers,? says Weir. If someone is interested in a piece of clothing, she will hold it up for them and carry it to the change room if they want to try it on.While Weir did use Facebook ?a bit? during the lockdown, it didn't go that well, mostly she suspects, because it is clothing and people want to try it on.This has been a huge hit to Weir's business, the loss of two months of operation. ?All the stock was already in for the spring and has to be paid for, the same goes for the fall stock that will arrive in August,? Weir explained. She is concerned that if there is another shut down it may be extremely difficult for her business to survive.?The one good thing is that all the customers have been excellent and so far, the appointment system really does work,? she added.Zihua Boutique is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. by appointment.At Unique Finds on Station St., owner Marty Robbins says it has been a bit of work getting things ready to open ?but fortunately I am handy,? he says. While his shop is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturdays, so far it has been pretty quiet. Robbins thinks some are either hesitant about going out to shop or perhaps do not have the money. The good news is that ?those who come in are happy and are buying,? he says.Robbins has set a six-person limit in the shop and everyone must sanitize their hands as they enter. There is a lot more cleaning of common spaces and the fitting rooms but ?we want everyone and ourselves to be safe,? he adds. At this point he is not enforcing masks as there is no reason why people cannot adhere to the physical distancing.Robbins did not use Facebook during the lockdown and with much of the merchandise being clothing, he says it, and curbside pick-up, would not work well. He hasn't yet thought about the new BBIA virtual marketplace that is soon to be launched.?Buying online may be the only way we buy things in the future,? commented Robbins. ?It is what it is, you just have to do your best.?Emily Mackinnon, owner of Mack Attack Outdoors on Hastings St. says ?it has been a lot of work to get things in place for re-opening and to know what to do, especially with little revenue coming in.? Her shop is now open Tuesday through Thursday from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.Mackinnon has a five-person limit in the store and has hand sanitizer on hand at the door. People can choose to wear a mask. She wears one if she has to leave the protected area behind the cash. There have been marks added to the floor to help ensure physical distancing and she discourages people from touching items themselves. The change rooms are currently closed as they do not have actual doors, something required under the current regulations.Mackinnon says she believes there is some hesitation in shopping but she did have a busy day on Friday. Sales of fishing equipment is a lot easier than clothing at the moment. About half of her customers were out of towners on Friday, cottagers.Over the past couple of months Mackinnon has focused on Facebook sales and curbside pick-up. ?Curbside almost made it viable.? She would be okay with going back to curbside if necessary, in order to protect herself and her family.At the Old Tin Shed on Sherbourne St., owner Kathryn Webber says ?it has been a lot of work thinking about everything especially since all the information was not in one spot. It was stressful and we want to be safe. It has also been expensive getting everything set up,? she says. Sourcing things like hand sanitizer was also a bit of a problem that they have since resolved. Marks have been put on the floor to keep people apart and they have added a barrier window at the cash. They are also limiting the number of people in the store at any one time to 10, with someone monitoring the door once that number is reached.While things have been on the slow side since re-opening, Webber says ?those who have come in are happy we are open and glad to have something to do.? She added that ?people are respecting distance and it is so nice to see people again.?During the lockdown period they used Facebook and did a fair bit of mailing to customers as well as some curbside pick-up. ?It kept a trickle of revenue coming in,? says Webber. People ordered items for Mother's Day and Easter.While only 1.5 of their typical five-person team has been re-hired, they are still managing with the reduced staff.Webber expressed concern about some of the dialogue out in the community about cottagers and hopes that it will not negatively impact her business. ?Cottagers are the mainstay of our business

and being disparaging about them will not help any of our businesses. This may have done a lot of damage. Unfortunately, those making the comments are not those who will suffer from it,? she added.