

The Fayetteville Observer

Our View: Downtown Fayetteville has had setbacks, but merchants are still striving

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August 8, 2020

Fayetteville's downtown experienced another setback this past week when the Dogwood Festival announced it would cancel for the year. The city's biggest festival was postponed from April over concerns of COVID-19. The announcement that it would not make a go of it in the fall is not surprising considering that the novel coronavirus is still surging, with a possible second wave in the fall.

Still, Thursday's announcement from festival officials is unwelcome news for downtown merchants and supporters — as was the reminder (first announced in May, but repeated this week) that the city's other major festival, the International Folk Festival, has been canceled, too.

Downtown has already endured the COVID-19 related restrictions that affect businesses across the state. The Fayetteville Woodpeckers, after a successful inaugural season downtown last summer, canceled its 2020 season along with the rest of Minor League Baseball. Multiple downtown properties were damaged during rioting on May 30 that grew out of protests over the death of George Floyd.

Unauthorized access.

But there is another story downtown that should not get lost in the shuffle. There are many businesses open and striving, there is plenty to do and there are plenty of reasons to visit — it is in a way microcosm of our small business community countywide.

Some merchants are getting creative.

The Cameo Art House Theatre on Hay Street is offering streaming of its independent movies. The theater has been closed since March. Patrons can now purchase popcorn and other concession-stand fare curbside.

Bianca Shoneman, president and CEO of the Cool Spring Downtown District, tells us that nearly 20 businesses downtown offer outdoor dining and patio setting. She said Cool Spring has launched a gift card program, currently with 31 businesses participating, where a customer receives \$25 free money for every \$50 he or she spends.

Shoneman noted the recently installed nine new, public artworks that are a part of Work in Progress, an ongoing exhibition sponsored by the Arts Council of Fayetteville/Cumberland County.

“Supporting local has never been more important,” Shoneman said. “COVID is going to change the face of retail so supporting hyper-local economic ecosystems — like our downtown — is imperative to ensure our city remains the authentic All American City it is.”

Shoneman is right.

Not all businesses will survive this COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions meant to keep the public safe.

But we can all do our part to help the creative, plucky owners, aka our neighbors, who are still able to give it the good fight — by masking up and going to check them out. See you downtown.



A sculpture by artist Craig Gray in downtown Fayetteville is part of the temporary exhibition, Work in Progress, sponsored by Arts Council of Fayetteville/Cumberland Contributed