



David Duplisea writes: 'Local businesses create pride of place – they are that thing we can't quite put our finger on about why we love our region.'

Photo: Submitted

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## David Duplisea | Commentary

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Change comes whether we're ready or not. The coronavirus pandemic has certainly shone the spotlight on how quickly shift happens. So, how do we adapt, keep our communities safe, and ensure our businesses survive?

It starts with getting our shift together.

Our local businesses were superstars when it came to adapting quickly. They've been nimble and creatively figured out how to ride the waves of uncertainty. They're doing everything they can to stay open.

As residents and consumers, we need to adjust, too. We need to ask ourselves some tough questions.

Are we taking an active role in our economic recovery? Or are we being too passive and too slow to respond? Are we looking for creative ways to support our local businesses? Are we shifting away from our old habits and making it a priority to shop and eat locally? Are we adapting our behaviours and confronting our uncertainty?

We have an opportunity to come out of this pandemic stronger than we were before. We're a model for best practice and non-partisanship in our handling of the coronavirus outbreak. How can we capitalize on that success to regain our competitive advantage on the national and international stage?

To get there, we need to move away from fear and toward careful and safe recovery. If we adhere to public health measures – wear masks in public, maintain the required social distance, wash our hands, and self-isolate if we've travelled outside the bubble – we can get back to business. And, yes, if we follow the public health measures, we can even safely vote in an election.

Working together, we can make the shift happen.

Residents, workers, consumers: we're calling on you to continue to support local businesses whenever you have the opportunity.

Local businesses create pride of place – they are that thing we can't quite put our finger on about why we love our region. These business owners are our friends, family and

neighbours. They create jobs, give to our charities, and pay taxes in our communities. They care about our communities. What actions can we take to ensure these businesses survive and thrive?

For many, online shopping became a firmly entrenched coronavirus-induced habit. It can be easy to think there's a better deal out there that we can't get locally. But we're lucky to have many unique and exciting businesses right here in our region. If you need help finding a local supplier, get in touch with us, your Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce. We're here to help champion our businesses and connect consumers to the services they need.

Large and medium-sized businesses: we're calling on you to make every effort to bring people back to the workplace in a responsible, organized manner. Safety is paramount, of course. But without the daily influx of workers, our restaurants and retail shops are struggling to fill their tables and sell their goods.

We have many unique selling propositions in this region: our strategic location, our reliable, high-speed internet, a diversified economy, an affordable cost of living and Saint John has the best energy rates in Atlantic Canada – definite advantages for companies looking to recruit and attract talent.

People choose to live and work here because they appreciate the quality of life in our region. People enjoy our restaurants and recreation options. They value our cultural and entertainment opportunities. They look to our small businesses and cultural institutions to create the quality of life they desire.

To build on our natural and built strengths and help grow our businesses, we need to safely get back to work. What creative adjustments can you employ to entice workers back to the

office? Are there incentives you can offer to make working from the office more desirable and efficient for employees?

What change needs to happen in your companies to get you back to business and more competitive than ever? How can we, your Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, help?

Our chamber has been around for just over 200 years. We've seen plenty of shifts in our time – some wins, some challenges. As we pull through this latest test of our spirit, there are many unknowns. But one thing is certain – we will keep working to make sure this newest shift doesn't take our community down.

The coronavirus economy emphasized our hometown pride and our love for our local businesses. From now on, we need to come together and continue to support them if we want to keep them. It's the right thing to do. How can we ensure it's the easy thing to do – not just in the current crisis, but always?

We are all in this together. We will get through this together.

Let's make some shift happen.

*David Duplisea is CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.*

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