

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

# New delivery service launched for uptown businesses



Pam Wheaton, owner of Heartbreak Boutique and Obscurity, says she's pleased with a new online delivery service launched by Uptown Saint John. The service is helping local businesses cope with the new orange phase restrictions in place. Photo: Telegraph-Journal Archives

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Saint John businesses are feeling the pinch from orange phase restrictions, local business advocates say, though many are adapting by offering free delivery and other services.

“They’re pretty creative, they’re entrepreneurs that are innovators, but it certainly does affect them,” said Nancy Tissington, executive director of Uptown Saint John, the local business improvement association.

Uptown Saint John launched last week a new delivery service, providing uptown businesses with free delivery to areas within the greater Saint John area, including Rothesay, Quispamsis, and Grand Bay-Westfield.

“We are getting lots of deliveries requests from local retailers and we’re in full delivery mode,” said Tissington, who noted the delivery service does not actually handle any money or interface with consumers, which is handled by participating businesses.

Tissington said the service has been seeing about a dozen delivery requests from businesses per day so far, but she expects demand for the service to ramp up in the next few days and weeks.

“So far so good,” said Pamela Wheaton, owner of Heartbreak Boutique and co-owner of Obscurity, two shops uptown.

“People are taking advantage of it. It’s really convenient. It’s pretty seamless. Orders come in, we let Uptown Saint John know we have orders, they pick them up and they do the delivery for us.

“It’s pretty great.”

Wheaton said Monday was the first day she had used the service, and so far, she had 20 items scheduled for delivery from the two stores.

Wheaton previously offered curbside pick-up, but not delivery, because she could not deliver and work the two store's physical locations at the same time. Wheaton added that in-person traffic is down this week since Saint John went into the orange phase Saturday.

"It's very, very, very quiet," she said.

If the delivery service is successful this year, Tissington said it may be repeated next year, even in non-COVID times. She encouraged the public to support local businesses during this time.

"I think people will be doing a little more online shopping to support local. That's what the hope is," Tissington said.

Others in the business community said that while they supported the public health measures, it was unfortunate that the restrictions happened so close to the busy Christmas shopping season.

"It's really bad timing," said David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.

"Businesses have been hoping and praying that it wouldn't get to this point. However, we recognize that we're there."

He said there is still time to save the Christmas shopping season, if Saint Johners can get the virus under control in the next two weeks.

"It's very precarious at the moment, and if people don't pay attention, and don't start with the safety protocols, then we are going to be in even bigger trouble," he said.

Duplisea called on the provincial and federal governments to provide more rapid testing to help get the virus under control.

"We do have a window of opportunity here, where if we hunker down and pay attention to the rules, then we could be in a good place in a few weeks."