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SOUTHBURY BUSINESS UPDATE

March 19, 2021

"Don't let what you can't do stop you from doing what you can do." ~ John Wooden

Local

Southbury in the News

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'Southbury has all the right stuff'

Town's location, innovation lead to strong economy

By Dan Nowak

Southbury Economic Development Director Kevin Bielmeier is "bullish on Southbury" and believes a combination of items have contributed to the town thriving and surviving the pandemic this past year.

The business climate has had its ups and downs in Southbury, especially in the early part of the pandemic when various public venues were shut down or had rules for operation modified to fit COVID-19 protocol. Bielmeier cites the full capacity or near full capacity of retail store space in the town's shopping plazas as an example of the town's thriving economy.

"Part of it is Southbury has all the right stuff, an attractive place to be to live and to have a business," Bielmeier said, that he believes the town's younger demographic has grown since the pandemic started with many people moving out of New York. "You can really feel things ramping up now in terms of incoming businesses applying for permits with a lot of that activity in Town Hall. A combination of things gives us a competitive edge when it comes to the town's economy."

Bielmeier said for younger people, being located off of a major highway like I-84 is a plus too. It also contributes to the business climate.

"It is a plus for Southbury being located right off a major highway," Bielmeier said. "It is not overbuilt, there is a beautiful, nature quality to it and that is a huge draw for people who want to live here. What that does is it makes it attractive for

the business community. Retailers recognize that and it's a competitive advantage.

"Our two biggest plazas, Southbury Shopping Plaza and Southbury Green, are right off the highway. Regency Center, which owns Southbury Green, doubled down on investing in the property and has (restaurants) Lucas Local, Mission:Salad and Southbury Deli along with Athleta (women's apparel) in the process of moving in. At Southbury Plaza Ultra Beauty and Choice Pet have moved in. As people close their doors, others look at the opportunity of moving their business into Southbury. It has become a great destination spot."

Athleta has yet to finalize a lease on its site and town approval is still needed for signage.

Bielmeier has been encouraged by innovative ideas that can benefit the business community in Southbury.

One concept is what is called a pop-up shop. The concept involves a home-based/online startup business taking a cost-effective chance to see if their business can be successful in a brick and mortar retail store. Instead of renting retail store space for the usual 1-year rental, the concept involves a startup business renting retail space for only 2-3 months to see if their business can be successful.

PiperandDune.com owner Christine Curtis pursued the pop-up shop concept and took her online New England-style gift shop to a retail store operation at Bennett Square.

"The roll-out model we executed might work for other businesses," said Curtis, whose on-

line PiperandDune.com business has had success. "Last September and October I started soliciting rental rates and availability for a temporary space to run a pop up shop for the holiday season. Kevin Bennett was quick to work with us to rent us the space at an affordable rate.

"I wasn't sure how the town would support the business or if I was willing to stay permanently, especially given COVID-19. We received a positive turnout and tremendous local support, so we made the decision to stay and expand into the adjoining empty space. Our pop up was open from Oct. 31, 2020 to Dec. 24, 2020 and the new permanent store opened Feb. 1."

Bielmeier said ideas like the pop-up concept is what captures his focus when it comes to economy thriving in Southbury. Bielmeier is encouraged by the success of Piper and Dune, and sees it as "proof-of-concept."

"I believe this type of arrangement is replicable," said Bielmeier. "Pop-up shops are gaining in popularity, especially in cities. I've long thought, why not here in Southbury? So, when Ms. Curtis proposed a temporary store for the holiday-season in Bennett Square I thought, here we go."

Following their lead, Bielmeier hopes to roll-out a Pop-Up Program to encourage commercial landlords to be open to leasing on a temporary basis to other, home-based businesses looking for an opportunity to put their toe-in-the-water and try a brick-n-mortar store.

"It's really a win-win," Bielmeier said. "The landlords are able to collect some rent on their



Piper and Dune owner Christine Curtis in her retail shop, a New England-style gift shop, in Bennett Square in Southbury on Thursday.

vacant spaces and the business owner sees if they have enough traffic to take the leap on the investment to a permanent location."

The past year, Bielmeier did what he could to help local businesses survive when the pandemic hit. Like businesses statewide, Southbury businesses were initially shellshocked when everything closed in Connecticut last spring.

"I went into an information zone, doing research and making sure the business community had all the info they needed for getting help," Bielmeier said. "I looked for every lifeline, every form of funding available for them. That was job one for me, it was my responsibility. I went to landlords for businesses to see what they could do to help with deferrals on rent for their retail space."

Another plus has been creat-

ing promotions to urge people to shop and eat local.

In an effort to increase business at restaurants, the Southbury Business Association and Southbury Economic Development Commission are co-sponsoring a weekly promotional contest called Eat, Click, Submit, Win. Anyone who orders curbside pickup or dines-in at a Southbury restaurant and spends \$25 or more can enter the weekly contest.

The contest runs through March 21 and for more information go to www.southbury-ct.org/WINTER.

"My focus is Forward Southbury," Bielmeier said. "It's how I've been signing my emails the last six months and is what we've been promoting. We're not dwelling on the crisis, but keeping our eyes on the horizon, on what Southbury can be in 2021 and beyond."

SBA's Southbury 2021 Winter Restaurant Promo ~ Final weekend!

All submissions eligible for Grand Prize drawings @ 12n on March 22nd on [Facebook Live](#)

VIDEO: [Week 9 drawing](#)



The banner is purple with white and yellow text. It features the Southbury logo in the top left, the SBA logo in the top right, and the text: "SOUTHBURY'S 2021 WINTER RESTAURANT PROMO", "EAT, CLICK, SUBMIT, WIN", "Win Restaurant Gift Certificates", "JANUARY 11 - MARCH 21", "to Enter Visit SOUTHBURY-CT.ORG/WINTER", "SOUTHBURY.COM", and "Union Savings Bank".

Southbury *Virtual* Arts Festival

March 20th 10am – 3pm



The banner has a light green and yellow background. It features the text: "SOUTHBURY Virtual Arts Festival", "Building Community Through the Arts - Bringing Joy, Enrichment, Connection", "Virtual Event - March 20th, 2021 • 10am - 3pm", and "Presented By: SAFC (Southbury Arts Festival Committee), New Morning Songwriters Series, Arts Escape Artists and Writers, Fred Astaire Dance Studio of Southbury, Heritage Village Theatre Guild".

Event details: [here](#)

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