



Council President Pro Tem
Barbara Bry
Council District 1



Dear Neighbors,

This week, we check in with one of my staff's favorite restaurants and bars, Wheat & Water in Bird Rock, to see how they're weathering this unparalleled economic downturn.

But first, we spotlight Highlands Jewelers, a mom-and-pop (and daughter!) business that planted roots in Carmel Valley in 1989 and vows never to leave.

If you own a D1 small business and have a pandemic story that you would like to share in my newsletter, please e-mail BarbaraBry@sandiego.gov.

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Council President Pro Tem

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Family Jeweler Refuses to be Benched

*Name: Highlands Jewelers
Location: 3830 Valley Centre Drive #706, Carmel Valley
Phone: (858) 481-9193
Website: www.highlandsjewelerssd.com
Hours: Monday to Saturday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Co-owners: Victor and Jeannette Manoushakia*

There are no rushes on jewelry during a pandemic. In fact, Highlands Jewelry reported a 90 percent drop in new sales.

"We tried staying open until 4 p.m., but nobody's coming in," said Jeanette Manoushakian, who co-owns and operates the Carmel Valley store with her husband, Victor.

Things got bad enough, the couple laid off their daughter, who also works in the store. (Longtime customers have known Julia since she was a baby.)

"We just told her, 'Sorry, there's no money,'" Jeannette recalled. "It wasn't that big of a deal," Julia added. "It's not like I couldn't see it coming."

Luckily for this D1 pillar, Victor specializes in jewelry repair and recycling, which buoyed business

back up to 40 percent of what it normally is this time of year.

"And we're doing OK with the loans that just came in," Jeannette added.

The couple applied for and received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster loans from the Small Business Association. They still owe back rent for March through May, but they said their landlord gave them until December 2021 to pay it back without interest or fees.

"I like jewelry-making," Victor said. "It's my passion because it's a constant creation of beautiful, one-of-a-kind art pieces and it makes me feel good visually and mentally."

Victor apprenticed under his jeweler uncles when he was 14 in their native Lebanon, polishing and cleaning the shop and making Armenian coffee.

"Then, one day, the jeweler wasn't there and they put me on the bench," he said.

Victor relocated to Canada before being hired as the bench jeweler for La Jolla's Bowers Jewelers by its founders, Ron and Marg Bowers. He met Jeannette, who was also born in Lebanon, at St. John Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church in Carmel Valley. They married 40 years ago and, in 1989, opened their own store together in Carmel Valley's Del Mar Highlands Town Center. (That's where the name "Highlands" comes from.)

"Carmel Valley is a terrific community," said Victor, who lives with his family there and serves on the Carmel Valley Planning Board.

Five years later, the Manoushakians took the business and its name — which was already successfully branded — with them to the then-new Piazza Carmel shopping center.

"Business is coming back slowly," Jeannette said. "People are realizing we're open and they come in."

Indeed, they were just able to hire Julia back, and it was a smart move. Since returning, their daughter added an online store to the Highlands Jewelers website.

"It'll come around," Jeannette said. "We'll survive."



Jeannette and Victor Manoushakian established Highlands Jewelers in Carmel Valley in 1989 and vow that it's not going anywhere.

Wheat & Water Steps Cautiously into Tomorrow

Name: Wheat & Water

Location: 5737 La Jolla Blvd., La Jolla

Phone: (858) 291-8690

Website: www.wheatandwater.com

Hours: 4-9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 4-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 4-8 p.m. Sunday

Co-owners: Ted Cochrane and Doug Ritz



Wheat & Water co-owner Ted Cochrane poses in his restaurant's outdoor dining section, which was its former parking lot. (In the morning, before the restaurant opens, he allows Studio Barre Bird Rock to conduct fitness classes on the artificial grass free of charge.)

Wheat & Water had hoped to pay back some money, not borrow more.

"We wanted to pay off a large portion of our investor debt," said Wheat & Water CEO Ted Cochrane, who co-founded the Bird Rock eatery four years ago with business partner Doug Ritz. "And now it's like we're going back in another pool of debt that we didn't want to acquire."

Cochrane, a La Jolla native whose first restaurant job was at El Pescador, estimated business at his pizza-and-salad eatery is down by at least half since the March 16 shutdown.

"It's been tough," he said. "It's been super tough."

Wheat & Water's predecessor, Bully's, closed its doors due to the last recession, in 2008, after more than 40 years in business.

"I wish there was more we could do," Cochrane said. "We'd love to have a lunch service, but it's going to be tough. There's not a lot of tourists cruising around."

Wheat & Water applied for and received a PPP loan, which Cochrane said didn't prove as helpful as he had hoped.

"Don't get me wrong," Cochrane said. "We're very appreciative because with the loan, we're current on our utilities and our fixed overhead. But I don't think the loan was necessarily designed for

restaurants, because we need sales to justify the machine. We need people coming in and spending money."

Prior to the shutdown, Wheat & Water employed a staff of 25 to 30. Now, there are 15.

"If we just bring a bunch of employees back in and put them on the clock, it doesn't make financial sense," Cochrane said.

Cochrane and Ritz negotiated an amortization of their back rent over two or three years starting next August or September. And Cochrane said they're doing their best to create more lines of revenue — such as to-go liquor.

"Hopefully, things go back to normal next year," Cochrane said, "or there's going to be a big shocker a year from now when all these things kind of blow up on us."