

Transcription

Series Population Health Trust
Episode COVID Economy
Duration 11:15
Deliver format H264

Intro

John Bowey - In 2019, Skagit county was a thriving community, supported by a healthy blend of business, agriculture, manufacturing and industry. But like many other communities around the U.S. and the world, the Covid-19 virus has presented so many unanticipated challenges.

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - Now that I'm sure you're more than 6ft away, I'm going to take this off cuz you'll be able to hear me a little better. I'm John Sternlicht, I'm the CEO of EDASC, which is the Economic Development Alliance of Skagit County. It's a 501c3 non-profit organization that's been around since the 1970's. And we are responsible for the long-term economic health of Skagit County: Its businesses, its citizens, its residents, the local governments, non profits. Uh we are involved with everybody in an effort to make sure we have a healthy and resilient economy.

You can't isolate economics anymore than you can isolate health or you can isolate education. One of our main concerns is that our economy in addition to being vital, healthy, prosperous and diverse is that it's also equitable. And if you don't enjoy good health then you aren't going to prosper economically. And the converse is also true, if you are suffering economically your health is probably at risk too. So there really is not much of a dividing line between those two concepts of economic health and physical, mental, emotional health.

Challenges

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - Since the pandemic began I think that the most immediate impacts were on businesses that depend on people physically coming in and spending their money and visiting. So restaurants, hotels, travel and tourism was decimated.

Paul Pickering (Max Dales Co-Owner) - It started with an 82 day closure, where we weren't allowed to have anybody inside the building. We were able to do some take out, but take out has never been our specialty. Our specialty has always been the experience of dining.

Barbara Atterberry (Owner of Bob's Chowder Bar) - At first, we decided as a team to stay very close and to focus on takeout. It's what we did originally, so we could fall back to that quite easily. And the part that we didn't anticipate was the availability of supplies.

Paul Pickering (Max Dales Co-Owner) - Since we've reopened we've experienced a general slowing of how many people actually come into the

building. We're a very large restaurant, but it's the fact of people feeling that they can be safe and go out in these strange times.

Michelle Moser (Pharmacist Consultant) - So in March things got actually really busy, because a lot of people were very concerned whether or not they were going to be able to get their medications. So we were really busy. But then things really quieted down because people weren't going to the doctor and weren't needing new prescriptions. So we kept ourselves busy with refills and trying to help people shop online. Because birthdays still happened and they still needed some gift buying. People still needed their vitamins and supplements. So we had to change our focus to people coming into the store and actually providing a curbside service.

Sean O'Leary (Owner at Ristretto) - It's been a struggle, in February of 2020 we were 25% above what we anticipated in forecast. By the end of May, we were at 25% of that - of our gross from the previous year.

Ben Lazowski (Owner at Valley Shine Distillery) - Since the shutdown for COVID we've really seen a decrease in people coming out, a decrease in people coming in to grab food. Bottle sales have been alright, but that's more of a grab and go kind of thing. But you know the meat of the business where the people come in for a drink or two and some dinner that's definitely slowed down.

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - Then there are businesses that had sort of second tier impacts. Maybe their business wasn't directly affected, but many many of their customers were. So their customers didn't have money to spend on what they were doing. So that's a second tier impact. And the general slowing down of the economy has an impact on people either having money to spend or being comfortable spending it.

Employee Safety

Barbara Atterberry (Owner of Bob's Chowder Bar) - The employees for the most part are comfortable. They do feel secure and they feel guarded that we as a business back them up whole heartedly when it comes to enforcing the COVID mandates laid out by the state.

Shay Tusow (Barista at Ristretto) - And I've kept my schedule kind of the same and been able to just show up and feel really safe and protected by not only the people that I work with but by the community as well. Everybody is really respectful as far as what rules we need to follow and all that kind of stuff.

Masking Challenges

Bob Clark (Co-owner of Babe Rainbow) - It's a touchy subject for anyone who owns a retail business. We're not in the business of getting into arguments with our customers, but it hasn't been a problem for us and we hope that that continues. We hope people can be sensible.

Alessia (Hair Stylist at Genesis Salon and Spa) - We have to take a lot of precautions, we have to be very sanitary very umh like take the temperature. We have to ask questions and make sure they haven't been around people and we have to wear a mask. So I feel comfortable. I don't sometimes feel comfortable knowing that my client's telling the truth cuz they want their hair done really bad.

Barbara Atterberry (Owner of Bob's Chowder Bar) - We had one customer that came and he called my son a Nazi for enforcing the mandates that were laid out. And then he gave the Nazi salute. And to call a 20-something-year-old young man that's doing his job a Nazi is over the top.

Monique Brigham (Sedro Woolley Chamber of Commerce) - Last week we had a gentleman come in, he was upset that we asked him to wait outside if he couldn't wear a mask. She went out and helped him, thought everything was fine, he left, he called the city and threw a fit. I called him, he said he was going to sue us if we didn't fire her. Well obviously we can't fire her for doing her job and for us trying to stay open.

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - Yeah I've got to say that's been a real mystery to me. When I want expert advice on my taxes I go to my accountant, when I want expert advice on my car I go to my mechanic, I go to my doctor for health issues, and I go to public health experts for advice on how to deal with a public health crisis. I don't know those answers, but I want to go to those who have dedicated their lives to figuring out how to prevent or contain pandemics.

Adaption

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - I think the key to survival of any species or any business is adaptability. And we've seen a lot of successful businesses adapt to the new situation. Some have pivoted, some manufacturers have pivoted to making PPE. Masks and other personal protective equipment or hand sanitizer. Just down the street Valley Shine Distillery made hand sanitizer, do not drink that. And uh so that kind of adaptation is good. Other businesses that tended to depend on people coming in to shop there have beefed up their online presence. And it's also about diversification, how can you figure out more new and different ways to make money and bring income streams into your business.

Inequity

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - People of color are much more susceptible to this virus and it's terrible impacts. There are numbers to back that up in terms of infection rates and mortality rates. Also people who are living in more denser spaces in closer quarters, people who have jobs that they can't do from home, and people who may have underlying health conditions because maybe they haven't had proper healthcare. Those are all populations that are more vulnerable to this disease and they are disproportionately found in communities of color.

Silvia Reed (Director at Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce) - So one of the challenges for a latino community here in Skagit County and in so many ways within the state of Washington, is the fact that the many industries and sectors where they work is food industries, agriculture and the trades so in each of those industries they can't take their work home, they many times don't have access to the technology so they can't - the possibility of working remotely is not available for them. So they have to show up for work or they don't get paid and they don't feed their families.

John Sternlicht (CEO of EDASC) - If we want the economy to reopen, and we all do, and if we are concerned about the economic health of small businesses, and their owners and staff. Then we have to be concerned about their physical health too. And that means that in order to limit the spread of this disease we need to all wear our masks, wash our hands, and obey the distancing rules that we need to stay at least 6ft apart. And when we're outside we need to be mindful of that too. This is an airborne virus, it is spread quite often by people who have no idea that they're infected. So it's not that lots of people are out there thinking I'm sick and I'm going to go breath on as many people as possible. There are people who are unwittingly spreading the disease, and that's why the masks and the distance and the handwashing are so important. The better we can be at that the sooner we will all be able to reopen. And with that, getting ready to go back outside. By the way masks can be fancy too.