

How Community Leaders Are Helping to Restart North Simcoe's Economy

As the country starts reopening for business, *The Tiny Cottager* asked four individuals and organizations committed to the economic well-being of North Simcoe these two questions:

- How is or will your organization be helping to re-start North Simcoe's economy?
 - How can seasonal and full-time residents contribute?
- Here's what they told us.

George Cornell, Mayor of Tiny Township and Warden of Simcoe County

On March 19, the County of Simcoe Economic Development Office (EDO), in partnership with its member municipalities, the Cities of Barrie and Orillia, and regional stakeholders, launched its COVID-19 Business Impact Survey to better understand their experiences. More than 800 responses are helping guide efforts to promote a strong economy and helping us bounce back.

In response to the survey, the EDO, with input from area partners, has created an action plan for business support and economic stimulus. As the situation evolves, services will continually be reviewed to ensure that the County is responsive in supporting the needs of the business community. The action plan includes numerous initiatives under six categories, including:

- financial support
- business outreach, support and resources
- workforce alignment
- economic development network collaboration and research
- business promotion
- potential broader economic stimulus

Many of these initiatives are underway or in the planning stages. In the meantime, the County of Simcoe is already working with local businesses that have adapted quickly to health precautions and continue to provide services to our residents and keep our economy going. Tourism Simcoe County and our Economic Development Office have created a directory of businesses on *Experience Simcoe County from Home* (<https://experience.simcoe.ca/>) that continue to serve our communities by providing delivery, take-out and curbside pick-up to help get us through these challenging times and continue to generate needed revenue for our economy.

Supporting local businesses also remains a priority for the Township of Tiny. In addition to being an active member of organizations that are dedicated to driving the economy, such as the Economic Development Corporation of North Simcoe and the Culture Alliance in the Heart of Georgian Bay, the township will continue to support the local economy through purchasing, programming/events, and our day-to-day operations.

Both the township and the county continue to ask residents to shop and invest locally where possible. Tiny's Recreation Department has launched an Instagram account, [@tinyrecreation](https://www.instagram.com/tinyrecreation), bringing the community virtual recreation resources, challenges, contests, and more. Contest winners will receive a gift card from a local business that offers online services. To keep our local tourism industry going, the county is promoting *Experience Simcoe County from Home*.

To help alleviate some of the financial burden being experienced by residents, the township extended the March 27 property tax due date to May 1, which was then further extended to June 26. Council will continue to monitor the situation and may consider extending the due date beyond June 26. The county is also working with the provincial and federal governments to help deliver emergency funding to residents, as well as increasing access to child care to help get families back to work as soon as it is safe to do so.

Cathy Tait, General Manager, Southern Georgian Bay Chamber of Commerce

Without a doubt, this is the most challenging and stressful environment that our business community will ever face. The mandate at the Chamber of Commerce at this time is to advocate on behalf of its 400+ business members and to provide solidarity and resources, however possible, to ensure that business owners are informed and supported.

To ensure that the business community is up to date on the government's relief programs, we continue to send out regular emails with new details and links to applicable programs. Most recently, we hosted a free webinar in partnership with the team at Grant Thornton to provide clarity about the federal government initiatives and how to access these funds: www.grantthornton.ca/insights/coronavirus-covid-19-finding-the-way-forward-guiding-businesses-through-coronavirus-COVID-19. The Chamber of Commerce has hosted or co-hosted a number of online webinars to address relief programs, including the new wage subsidies and loans. We are working with the Barrie Chamber of Commerce and Sandbox to present additional webinars to address cash flow and budgeting, staffing issues, moving a business to online sales, and maintaining positive mental health. These webinars are available to the entire community at no charge.

"When COVID-19 retreats, it will be more important than ever to support our local businesses to get them back on their feet."

On a daily basis, we are responding to members' emails and phone calls with questions and concerns. We continue to direct business owners to the appropriate governmental sites and assist them with navigating the many available programs.

For members that are still open for business with modified services and hours, we continue to promote them via our social media platforms. Having grown our Facebook presence in the community to in excess of 10,000 people engaged each week, we are able to generate significant awareness for members. With a positive outlook and an optimistic tone, we have also promoted members' events and services through a number of social media contests.

The community is also invited to visit a dedicated landing page on the Chamber of Commerce website (<https://southgeorgianbay.ca/news/whats-open>) with up-to-date listings of businesses still open and any modified services.

We look forward to the day when businesses are bustling with shoppers and once again flourishing, and welcome any questions or input; ctait@sgbchamber.ca.

Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North

The provincial government will continue to work in collaboration with the federal government to support businesses of all levels.

In partnership with local municipalities and chambers, we are in constant dialogue with our business communities to come up with ways to boost the economy and engage businesses with the community under a different lens during the COVID-19 crisis, and looking ahead to what the business models might look like in the near and distant future. Currently, I attend weekly meetings with organized groups for the sole purpose of sharing information and brainstorming on business retention and development. Information is then shared with the business sectors of these communities and within North Simcoe for input, discussion and collaboration.

Groups such as COVID-19 and Our Community in Orillia, led by the Orillia Chamber of Commerce, and North Simcoe Business Recovery Task Force out of Midland are taking the lead in sharing valuable information and looking for partnerships and opportunities to support the business sector.

These ongoing meetings are conducted via video conferencing and are a regular part of my commitment to assisting those businesses trying to push through this difficult time. These meetings also enable me to provide important input from the provincial level in order to assist in the rebuild of the business infrastructure that so many communities have worked so hard to create. These businesses have become the fabric of many downtown cores and contributors of jobs for so many families over many years. We, as a community and as a province, need to keep the communication going. We need to stay steadfast with our social distancing in order to flat-line the curve of COVID-19, in order to eventually gradually re-open our economy. We are all in this together and will get through this together.

Bruce Stanton, MP, Simcoe-North

At the time of writing this submission in April, I and my staff are busy keeping up with the steady flow of announcements coming from the federal government, all aimed at helping workers and businesses get through this unprecedented shutdown (in our generation) of all but essential business activities. My offices and I are working to be as accessible as possible to constituents and provide information and guidance by telephone and email. We are using every means available to communicate and assist in this difficult time.

To sustain the economy in Tiny and North Simcoe, the federal emergency response programs such as the 75% wage subsidy (CEWS), the Canada Emergency Business Account (\$40,000 no-interest, guaranteed loan) and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) will help bridge the income gap for workers and the fixed costs obligations of businesses.

Phil's Casual Dining in Penetanguishene is a good example. Theo Karpathios owns this popular local business, as well as Phil's Pub & Eatery in Midland. To help flatten the COVID-19 curve, restaurants were closed except for take-out and delivery. Theo changed his menu, switching to take-out items, and offering specials for first-responders and front-line health care workers. He is able to continue operating, but in his case the Canada Emergency Business Account and the wage subsidy program will help him carry through until the situation improves, hopefully this summer.

There is another local example of how a crisis like this can enable Canada's innovative manufacturers for new opportunities. Industrial Filter Manufacturing (IFM) in Penetanguishene makes high-quality filters for industrial air flow machinery such as vacuums and ventilation systems. They have all the capabilities needed to produce personal protection N95 face masks, the kind in short supply. Under an interim order respecting medical devices, issued by the Minister of Health, companies like IFM can get their medical product certifications fast tracked. They still need to meet proper standards, but IFM's attesting to these will now suffice. It's more important to get them into production.

For workers laid off because their employers' businesses were closed or revenues plummeted due to COVID-19, the CERB program is providing \$2,000 per month until mid-July. Under new rules they can even earn up to \$1,000 per month in freelance or part-time work and still collect the CERB. This won't be an ideal situation for most people in these types of layoffs, but it will prevent them from getting too far behind. The CERB will be helping thousands of families to meet their financial commitments and purchase their essential supplies through this health crisis.

All contributions have been lightly edited.

8 Ways We Can All Contribute

We can all help re-start North Simcoe's economy by following these eight suggestions from the community leaders who contributed to this article.

- Shop locally, even after restrictions are lifted.
- Support local restaurants offering curbside pick-up, take-out and delivery.
- Buy local produce. Visit www.farm2door.ca to shop directly from North Simcoe farmers.
- Raise local business' online profile by "liking" and "sharing" social media posts, and posting your own reviews.
- Purchase gift cards to support local businesses for redemption once restrictions are lifted.
- Donate to local charities that provide vital services, such as food banks and hospitals.
- Support summer day camps that are affordable to families.
- Follow guidelines that have been put into place for your own health and the well-being of your community.



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