

I am writing you tonight to give you a glimpse into our week at my family of stores in Ashland Oregon. The Paddington Family of Stores consist of 4 award winning specialty shops in downtown Ashland. We have been in business since 1973 and my family has owned the stores since 1993. We have weathered many tough storms in the last few years - smoke filled summers and last summer an ill advised decision by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to use the Ashland High School Theatre across town instead of their own outdoor theatre which limited the amount of seats available and sending our visitors across town to the high school. We ended our year with modest sales gains but with compromised margins. We lost about 10% of our staff through attrition and were feeling comfortable with our staff levels in early 2020 and our sales for January and February posted gains. Our business was recovering.

We felt our world crumble in March with the threat of the Coronavirus changing our world. Each day brought more uncertainty to our business community. We laid off 8 staff members this week representing 30% of our staff. It was the hardest day in my retail career. The sad truth is, we will need to layoff additional staff within the next few weeks if our business climate does not change. Today we dropped 50% in sales, a \$6,500 drop. We lost \$13,000 in sales this week. I will not take a paycheck. We have canceled all of our on order. We have asked for rent reduction from our landlords. We are looking at any way to save money.

Today my daughter and business partner Kelly and I spent seven hours walking downtown Ashland seeking to hear from our fellow merchants. We asked six simple questions and hit 90% of our retail neighbors, about 43 stores. We talked mostly to managers and owners, but sales associates also. Everyone talked and our prompts led to emotional discussions. Our merchants need to be heard. Many are now running with few employees and are simply unable to get out. They are isolated and in desperate need of communication and help. Very few wanted to be anonymous. As you might imagine it was difficult to obtain actual numbers or even percents but they were all in a business spiral.

My daughter is compiling the unscientific data tonight to share with our chamber of commerce, mayor and Pam Marsh our state representative. We can include you also. I don't know how valuable the information will be, but I do know we really made a difference in the mental health of many and everyone seemed grateful for someone to listen to them.

Our retail community needs help, leadership and hope quickly.

Addendum March 18th, 2020

In the following days we have had to lay off an additional 11 staff members, totaling about half our staff. The remaining staff has been put on the Oregon Jobshare program, which will allow us to avoid laying the remaining staff off in the immediate future. We are anticipating a mandate to shut non-essential businesses, and are working hard to keep our business sustainable. Assistance through SBA loans, payroll tax relief, and suspension of the new CAT tax is vital for our small business community.

Sincerely,
Pam Hammond Morris and Kelly Jean Cooney

Kelly Jean Cooney

Owner
(541) 488-1715 Phone
(541) 482-1343 Phone
(541) 488-2842 Fax

