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## **Outdoor seating and dining supports Pawtucket businesses - by Donald Grebien**

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Mayor Donald Grebien

The city of Pawtucket recognizes the critical role that food and beverage establishments play in the vitality of our community, and we also recognize the harsh impact of COVID-19 upon these small businesses.

At the outset of the pandemic, the city moved swiftly to assist small businesses, particularly in the food and beverage industry, with the creation of an emergency loan program through the Pawtucket Business Development Corp. (PBDC) which received an overwhelming response. The PBDC continues to provide funding to local businesses through its COVID-19 Loan Program. The city also partnered with the State Commerce Corp., the RI Hospitality Association, Pawtucket Foundation, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a series of local webinars providing technical assistance to Pawtucket businesses in English and Spanish.

Pawtucket's city council also approved a resolution to simplify the regulations allowing the opening of outdoor dining in the city. Dozens of Pawtucket businesses took advantage of this streamlined local process and were able to continue to serve their customers.

As winter approaches and the temperatures drop, governor Raimondo's "Take It Outside" initiative is a great way for Rhode Island's restaurants to increase their outdoor serving capabilities, keeping their staff and customers safe, helping them increase their bottom line. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced our restaurants to adapt; to setting up contact-less pickup, to online ordering, to reconfiguring indoor and outdoor space and more.

The Pawtucket Foundation, partnering with the city of Pawtucket, was awarded \$70,000 in "Take it Outside" grant funding from Rhode Island Commerce. More than a dozen local restaurants are now receiving funding through this program. Many of these applicants were looking for ways to remain open outside into the fall season and to assist them in opening earlier in the spring. Grants (of up to \$6,000) will supply the successful applicants with items for use on outside patios and parking lots, including propane and electric heaters, tents, canopies, chairs, tables, and lighting.

My administration will continue to stand by and assist the city's hospitality industry and the entire Pawtucket small business community. They are an economic engine to our local economy. We will continue to support our restaurants and local business community. We hope the public joins us in supporting Pawtucket's local restaurants this fall and winter.

Donald Grebien is the mayor of city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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