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**Examiner**

# Salutes Small Business



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# Importance of Local Small Independent Businesses (LSIB)

By Bob Giordano

Local small independent businesses (LSIB) constitute a major force in the U.S. economy. There are more than twenty-seven million local small independent businesses in this country, and they generate about 50 percent (\$10.15 Trillion) of our gross domestic product (GDP \$20.3 Trillion).

LSIB created 1.8 million jobs in 2019. As of 2019, the SBA estimates there are 30.7 million local small independent businesses employing (59.9 million) 47.3% of the entire U.S. private workforce.

LSIB provide opportunities for entrepreneurs, jobs for neighbors and gathering places for friend's families and communities. They are rooted in the landscape where they grow, and they give back vitality and sustenance. Their importance to local communities is emotionally connected to buying and selling with friends and neighbors.

LSIB are integral parts of local economies, helping to create webs of financial interdependence that foster broad-based prosperity. When you spend money at a privately owned local store, that money goes to pay a worker in your neighborhood, who, in turn, is likely to spend money at another neighborhood business. The more that small businesses leverage their potential to support each other, the greater their capacity to create a thriving local business community.

There are far-reaching advantages to deciding to "shop local." By supporting

LSIB, you are in turn supporting your local economy; significantly more money stays in a community when purchases are made at locally owned – rather than Big Box, National, Regional chains or via ecommerce.

- LSIB are the backbone of their community. For every \$100 you spend at local businesses, \$68 will stay in the community. Spend that same \$100 with a Big Box Store, National or Regional Chain, ecommerce and just \$43 stays in the community.
- LSIB retailers return more than three times as much money per dollar of sales to the community in which they operate than chain competitors. Independent restaurants return more than two times as much money per dollar of sales than national restaurant chains.
- LSIB are owned and operated by your neighbors! They care about and are invested in the well-being of your community and its future.
- There are far-reaching advantages to deciding to "shop local." By supporting LSIBs, you are in turn supporting your local economy; significantly more money stays in a community when purchases are made at locally owned – rather than nationally owned – businesses

Exceptional service. More than just a product or service, LSIBs offer customers an experience. Local companies can provide one-on-one service that is often impossible for large corporations. Excellent service encourages customers to build personal connections with the businesses they buy



Bob Giordano, YSBA President, with Support Connection Executive Director and YSBA Board Member Katherine Quinn and Yorktown Highway Superintendent Dave Paganelli, YSBA Vice President.

from.

LSIB provide character and individuality to a community. It is neighbors helping neighbors — friends helping friends. However, small businesses are more than that. They benefit their local communities in many concrete, quantifiable ways. Volunteer work, charitable donations, or participating in community festivals and events are all common for LSIB owners. 52% of LSIB owners donate to charity, and of those that donate, 90% donate to local causes.

LSIB owners often live, work and play in their communities, taking pride in making their towns a desirable destination for all to enjoy. Building the reputation of your small business through volunteer work and

community involvement, no matter what goods or services you are providing, is the most effective advertising that you can do.

To find out more about the YSBA (Yorktown Small Business Association) [www.yorktownsba.com](http://www.yorktownsba.com), WIBA (Westchester Independent Business Alliance) initiative [www.westchesterIBA.com](http://www.westchesterIBA.com) and our Alliance with AMIBA (American Independent Business Alliance) [www.amiba.net](http://www.amiba.net) follow the links. We would welcome your membership, sponsorship, support or all three.

*Thanks to US SBA, BBB and the Houston Chronicle for their excellent publications and data we were able to access and share for this article. Bob Giordano [yorktownsba@optonline.net](mailto:yorktownsba@optonline.net) 914-874-4347*

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# The Gramercy Restaurant Aims to Build Long-Term Bonds with Patrons

By Sherrie Dulworth

Its name originates from the old French word “gran-merci,” and great thanks are a foundational principle at The Gramercy restaurant in Yorktown Heights.

“I felt it was very fitting for the hospitality industry to show a huge sign of gratitude and say thank you to everyone who supports our business,” said JT Selimaj, The Gramercy’s owner.

The 34-year-old restaurateur added, “I really look at this place as a home and it’s how I treat people. It’s not just a business transaction.” His goal is more than good food alone. “People eat all day long but there are certain places that are special to everyone. I believe a huge part of that is the experience.”

With a relaxed, engaged manner and quiet voice, Selimaj explained that the establishment’s name also reflects his Manhattan Gramercy Park roots, an area still dear to his heart. He started helping in his family’s restaurants when he was 15 years old.

He and his finance, a native of Chappaqua, wanted to live in northern Westchester. Selimaj started looking for restaurant space in 2018. He saw potential inside the red brick building with wide arches, previously home to a sports bar. “The bones for the space were there. I loved the space, the windows, the frontage,” he said.

After a 13-month interior renovation, The Gramercy opened in March 2019, now transformed with elegant sleek ambiance, spacious and warm, wooden floors with light

streaming through large pane windows. It is a place suited to meet-up with friends for appetizers and drinks at the bar as well as savor a meal over leisurely-paced dining.

Described as an American Brasserie, the menu can also attract a cross-section of diners, from those hungry for a classic burger or others in the mood for more formal cuisine, like shrimp Marseille or duck cassoulet, the latter being a recent favorite with guests.

Just shy of The Gramercy’s first-year anniversary, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted indoor dining. The previous November, Selimaj had decided to add an outdoor patio, which turned out to be a serendipitous asset with its 60-guest seating capacity.

Selimaj said, “The town has been wonderful. We are very fortunate; without their support we wouldn’t be here.” He added, “As soon as we shut down, we got hundreds of calls for gift certificates, people buying for neighbors and friends.” The restaurant created a three-course prix fixe takeout option for \$28, which has been so popular, they continue to offer it.

During the shutdown, The Gramercy joined in a local multiorganizational Community Table Partnership that helped provide food to people in need through County grant funding. According to Cheryl Sanchez, the former Executive Director of the Yorktown Small Business Association who headed the initiative, “I was happy that through the YSBA we were able to bring the money to Yorktown to help both small

businesses and families during a challenging time.”

Now, business is moving closer to the pre-COVID level, including a return of pre-pandemic diners. “It’s great to see them coming back,” Selimaj said. The 3,500-square-foot restaurant and bar offers ample room for physical distancing.

Private events like communion celebrations, birthday parties, and showers provide another business uptick.

According to Selimaj, post-pandemic business challenges include finding available employee assistance and rising produce costs, which are up an estimated 15 to 20 percent, created by supply and demand.

Selimaj has a vision for a VIP Dining Club, which was delayed because of the pandemic. Members might have perks like a monthly chef’s tasting and the chance to explore new cuisines and beverages. It gives the business another way to engage with customers and gain their feedback.

He believes it is important is to try to anticipate what is coming next in the world of food, not just as fads but longer lasting trends. He cites an example of the



rising interest in vegan options. “Food is constantly evolving and changing,” he noted. “What will the dining scene look like in a few years? What will service look like? What will the food options be?”

Speaking of the future, Selimaj said The Gramercy has a 10-year lease with two five-year options to renew at the current location. “We plan to be here a long-time, hopefully,” he said. “Ultimately, the maximum business reward will be if we can build a sustainable, long-lasting business that gives people value and builds long-term relationships.”

*The Gramercy is located at 345 Kear Street, Yorktown Heights. The Gramercy - American Restaurant in Yorktown Heights, NY (the-gramercy.com)*

## Peace Garden for Women Veterans

The Barbara Giordano Foundation & the Town of Greenburgh will install a Peace Garden honoring women veterans this fall at the Greenburgh Library.

If you would like to make a donation to support the garden or the Foundation, go to [www.GiordanoFoundation.org](http://www.GiordanoFoundation.org) and click DONATE.

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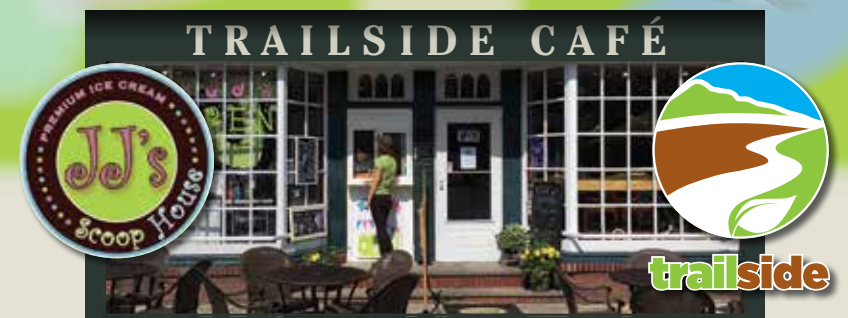
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# Community Support Helped Keep Yorktown Pizza & Pasta Afloat

By Abby Luby

Joe Giuliano, owner of Yorktown Pizza and Pasta for more than 30 years, stood outside his restaurant looking at the small garden of bolted broccoli rabe his father planted before he died last year.

"I've let the plants go to seed to save the seeds because they are part of my father," Giuliano said. "I'm sentimental."

Giuliano's restaurant is one of Yorktown's steadfast eateries located right in the heart of Yorktown Heights. The menu mainstay, of course, is pizza, and specialty slices and pies can be embellished with a variety of

toppings. The expansive menu offers soups like tortellini soup, assorted appetizers and sides including broccoli rabe and sausages, different salads, more than 20 different pasta dishes, meat entrees including chicken, veal or shrimp parmigiana, hot and cold sandwiches and wedges.

When the pandemic hit, Giuliano said he had to quickly switch gears and offer curbside service and pizza delivery.

"We were told we could stay open because we were considered essential. Curbside pick-up and delivery saved us, it's what kept us afloat," he explained.

For more than a year during the pandemic Giuliano was able to keep all of his staff

working, including his wife, son and daughter who work there as well. His staff had to take a sanitation course to learn the proper handling of food according to updated guidelines from the health department. Some high-priced menu items were dropped, signage went up as did sheets of plexiglass for the restaurant foot traffic.

Giuliano said at the beginning customers called in wanting to know what they were doing to keep everyone safe. "We were unsure ourselves back then, but we tried to keep everyone calm and run the business as normal as we could," he said.

It was the Yorktown community who showed continuing support. Large numbers of gift cards were purchased by residents

and by many local organizations. Among those helping to keep the restaurant open was Support Connection, which purchased several hundred dollars of \$50 gift cards to give to essential workers, including police and firefighters; the Yorktown Youth Athletic League ordered more than 1,200 sandwiches for nurses at the New York-Presbyterian Hudson Valley Hospital; BJ's placed large orders of pizza for their over-worked staff at the beginning of the pandemic; and the Yorktown Chamber of Commerce actively promoted Yorktown Pizza.

"Because of all the help and support we got, we were lucky enough to be able to pay our rent and utilities," Giuliano said. "We didn't need to apply for any loans."



ABBY LUBY PHOTO

Joe Giuliano, owner of Yorktown Pizza & Pasta, displays some of his pizza offerings.

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# Invest in Your Community – Shop Local

By Adam Stone

As we head into summer, optimistic about better, healthier, more normal days ahead, it seems fitting to salute the successful efforts of business owners across the area in navigating the treacherous terrain of the past 15 months.

Area entrepreneurs have had to muster all of their ample problem-solving skills to address the challenges associated with the pandemic. As a community, it's important we acknowledge these efforts and rally to support local business like never before. After all, when we envision the towns where

we live, what images do we usually conjure? It's so often of the stores dotting main street. But it's not just the downtown. The business community more broadly engines the local culture and general atmosphere.

So when Bob Giordano of the Yorktown Small Business Association approached me about producing this special section, I jumped at the opportunity. Thanks to a generous grant the YSBA received, we were able to provide more than two dozen local enterprises with free ad space while also telling the success stories of a handful of standout area business owners. Yet the best way we can all say thank you is to make

shopping local a way of life. It's not just the business owners that benefit. By spending local, you're investing in your community. So next time you're about to click the Amazon app, alter your habit, take a trip downtown,

and invest in your community — your home — instead.

*Adam Stone is the publisher of Examiner Media.*

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# Trailside Café Slowly Rebounds from Pandemic Shortfalls

By Anna Young

While navigating the COVID-19 crisis as a health food eatery certainly had its challenges, Trailside Café manager Ulbel Rodriguez said it was even tougher grappling with the grim realization that some loyal customers were never going to return.

"It was sad when you didn't see a returning customer, which was really tough for us because you started noticing they probably got sick with COVID or they didn't make it," Rodriguez said. "In a sense our regulars are family to us; they used to come in everyday and then

stopped out of nowhere and anything could have happened."

Because the folks at the Yorktown-based café feel so strongly for their clientele, a decision was made early on that despite the financial hit the business may take due to the health crisis, they were going to keep their doors open daily. Even if that meant only making \$10 a day off two cups of coffee.

Rodriguez compared the experience to a snowstorm that continued every day.

"Most of the businesses here have stayed open just to keep their customers happy," Rodriguez said. "I don't think anybody was thinking about making a

penny, just to be quite honest."

Rodriguez added that the pandemic had done so much to negatively impact so many people – even himself getting diagnosed with the virus last March – but urged that closing the doors to the café would have been another loss for people to cope with. He said he couldn't do that to those who needed a pick-me-up on their way to work in the morning or his one full-time employee.

But with a lack of foot traffic and a decline in business impacting the café, which caters to those seeking a healthier diet offering smoothies, juice blends, acai

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*'We're hoping to get back the traffic flow that we had before and we're hoping to get back our customers and many new ones.'*  
- Ulbel Rodriguez

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bowls, coffee, paninis, and ice cream, Rodriguez, like many restaurateurs, began to rely heavily on social media to entice people to place an order.

Rodriguez said he also dabbled with third-party delivery services for a bit but felt that wasn't the best course for the business.

"It was really tough for us each week seeing ourselves go down from the week before," Rodriguez said. "We had to adapt to all of this, and we tried our best with social media and word of mouth to get customers in."

While business struggled for some time, Rodriguez said old and new customers slowly began to return as coronavirus cases began to improve late last spring. With the café adjacent to the North Country

Trailway, he noted how the business gets much of their revenue during the warmer months from people walking along the path.

Now a year later with more people vaccinated and unafraid to leave their homes, Rodriguez said that while business has been booming, they're still working to make up the shortfall the pandemic caused. Rodriguez said business is still down 50 percent compared to two years ago and is striving to hire and adequately pay for extra employees.

He said the café will usually hire as many local teens as possible to work the summer months.

"It's been tough to be competitive at paying people because we can't have people risking their lives and not reward them," Rodriguez said. "You have to be

kind when it comes to that and you're basically putting your health and your family's health on the line because you're seeing people every day."

With summer around the corner, Rodriguez is simply elated Trailside Café survived the last year and can offer customers the valued service and health options they've been providing for nearly a decade.

"We're hoping to get back the traffic flow that we had before and we're hoping to get back our customers and many new ones," Rodriguez said. "Many people are suddenly going the healthy way and are more aware of their health than they were before. We'll be here to best serve customers' needs with proteins and vitamins in a tasty juice."



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# Signs Ink Weathers the Pandemic Storm with Creative Touches

By Erin Maher

If you live in the tri-state area, chances are, you're familiar with Signs Ink's work. From The Club in Briarcliff to the Katonah Lewisboro School District, hundreds of other places in Westchester County and beyond have featured sign products and sign services from the Westchester born-and-bred business.

Signs Ink was established in 1989 by brothers Tim and Matt Beachak in Yorktown Heights. The brothers grew up in Cortlandt. Over the years, the business has expanded to nine full-time employees.

"We create everything from small signs to large signs," said Signs Ink CEO, Tim Beach.

Signs Ink services include monuments and carved signs, neon signs, vehicle wraps and lettering, and more, all done in-house. Most of Signs Ink's customers are small businesses in the Westchester community.

After 30 years in business, Signs Ink, like many businesses throughout the nation and the world, faced a crucible in 2020 when it came to the pandemic.

"The pandemic was scary. We didn't know what was going to happen," said Beach.

Signs Ink was considered an essential business and stayed open throughout the entirety of the pandemic. But business proved difficult, as Signs Ink saw a decrease in orders from its usual clientele of fellow businesses. Signs Ink also could not conduct a lot of its regular services, such as sign installations or client visits and in-person consultations.

Instead of paralysis from its limited

services, Signs Ink kicked into high gear and found a fun, celebratory way to stay afloat. Signs Ink pivoted its focus to the design and production of graduation signs for local students. Whether it was graduation from high school, college, eighth grade or just finishing another year of school, Signs Ink produced plenty of the signs for students in Westchester that enabled families to share the exciting news, all while maintaining social distancing and COVID precautions.

Signs Ink managed not only to keep its business running but showed gratitude to those on the front lines in hospitals, facing COVID head-on daily. Signs Ink designed, produced and donated large signs that read, "Heroes Work Here," to six different hospitals, including Northern Westchester Hospital in Mount Kisco, Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla and Phelps Hospital in Tarrytown.

"The signs were our little way of giving back," said Beach.

Signs Ink's altruism did not end at the signs. The pandemic sparked a national shortage of personal protection equipment for medical workers and regular civilians alike. It helped mitigate the shortage and fabricated face shields in-house that were donated to health care workers in the county.

With the pandemic coming to a close and restrictions lifting, Signs Ink is looking forward to business picking back up and continuing to serve the customers it has been dedicated to for the past 31 years.

For more information on Signs Ink and its services, visit [signsink.com](http://signsink.com) or call (914) 739-9059.



PHOTOS BY TIM BEACHAK, CEO, SIGNS INK

Signs ink "Heroes Work Here" sign donated to Northern Westchester Hospital in Mt. Kisco.



Signs ink office and factory located in Yorktown, N.Y.

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