

BizFed Bounce Back



BizFed members share stories of resilience.

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In the face of COVID19, BizFed members bounce back with perseverance, creativity and resourcefulness.

TAFT BUSINESSES INNOVATE THROUGH COVID

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the state earlier this year, it disrupted an economic transformation at the city of Taft.

Propped up by an oil industry that attracts workers from miles around, Taft's economy is not only dependent on an energy sector that's increasingly under threat by state regulations, but it relies on commuters spending money at local shops and restaurants on lunch breaks and after work. Unfortunately, the shutdown forced many of those workers to stay home.

"Our main concern has been supporting our local businesses and making sure they can count on out-of-towners to continue to shop local," said Shannon Miller, Director of Operations for the Taft Chamber of Commerce. "Bakersfield is thirty minutes away. People go there to Costco because our Kmart closed."

Transforming The Local Economy

Prior to the shutdown, the Chamber was making Taft's economy more self-sufficient, working with Fresno State University on small business development, hosting courses to run an incubator program, to give Taft residents less of a reason to travel to Bakersfield to make bigger purchases.

"We're trying to create business for the things people most likely leave the area for," Miller said.

Businesses Adapt

A lot of positive change happened organically. Many businesses have adapted to COVID reality, including curbside to-go ordering and pop-ups transforming unused areas of parking lots. Other businesses are learning to operate remotely. And so far only a few businesses have shuttered for good.

"This whole thing has forced people to be more creative and think outside the box," Miller said. "There is a lot of devastation and economic recovery that has to occur, but we are remaining positive."

Meanwhile, the Chamber has continued supporting the local economy by compiling a list of businesses that includes modifications and updated hours, even for those that aren't Chamber members, creating a greater sense of community.

"These are our residents and our families," Miller said. "If they're willing to be open, then we need to support them as much as possible."

A Future Tied To Oil

The future of oil is still a concern in Taft. If Governor Gavin Newsom continues to over-regulate the oil industry, local tax revenue will take a hit. What will that mean for local schools? Or the recreation department? Healthcare? The water district?



Shannon Miller - Director of Operations and Marketing, Taft District Chamber of Commerce

"All of these are funded through tax revenue," Miller said. "It is going to be a struggle."



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