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Local businesses excited to open their doors as we move to Phase 2

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Local businesses are beginning to open their doors after months of being closed as the province continues its move to Stage 2 in the reopening of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic.

?I was devastated when I was told I had to close,? said Glenda Keeping, owner and senior stylist at Changes Hair Studio in Shelburne. ?I was panicking because I had to tell my employees that they were laid-off.?

Changes Hair Studio is one of the local businesses that is able to reopen with the move to Stage 2, falling under personal care services. The hair salon opened its doors for appointments on June 15, three days after the province moved into its regional-based Stage 2 framework post-COVID, and after 3-months of being closed.

?I was more nervous about reopening than I was closing,? said Keeping. ?I was sad closing, but I was anxious and nervous about reopening and the protocols I had to follow.?

To reopen her salon, Keeping has had to limit the number of customers to keep in line with Stage 2 protocols. For Changes Hair that means four customers, four stylists and a front desk worker are allowed in the salon at a time. Keeping has also had to invest in PPE and plexiglass to separate sinks, all of which she says has cost her around $3,000 and was ?quite a financial hit?.

Shelburne's Stage 2 status has also meant that restaurants with patio space are able to open for dining.

Shannon Chahal, owner of Shannon's Tap & Grill is one of those restaurants gearing up for patio dining, planning to have theirs, with the new protocols, up and running in the next couple of weeks. During the peak of COVID-19, the restaurant was able to remain open by offering take-out and delivery services to the community.

?It was definitely scary because we didn't know, futuristically, what the impact was going to be to the business,? said Chahal. ?We were sad to have to lay off all of our staff, and we didn't know what the next steps were going to be. It was a day-to-day process.?

Chahal noted that a challenge with the restaurant remaining open has been the new daily requirements put out by the provincial government, becoming accustom to them over the three months, and now having to make the switch into Stage 2.

?We were managing a business not having to wear masks all the time, through where the numbers were the highest, now this week having to wear masks all the time, and having to readjust our internal set up with hand sanitizers and stopping customers at the door if they don't have proper face covering,? said Chahal touching on the ways the restaurant has had to adjust in Stage 2.

For small businesses COVID-19 has brought a significant financial hit, with many store owners having to consider the possibility of permanently closing. In a report on the impact of COVID-19 on small business done by Stats Canada back in March, it showed that small businesses where more likely to report higher declines in revenue, number of layoffs, and the need to ask for credit or assistance compared to companies with 500 or more employees.

?I knew financially I was going to take a huge hit but I strongly believed that my clientele and my staff were going to stick with me and I was going to be ok,? said Keeping, adding that the ?what if' of closing had crossed her mind. Keeping also says that the financial impact of COVID-19 will take at least six months to recover from.

For more information on what is reopening during Stage 2 go to Ontario.ca.