

Roseisle Community Grocery Co-op celebrates 15 years amid COVID-19

By Emily Distefano

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many aspects of our lives, but the crisis has also revealed how vital small businesses like the Roseisle Community Grocery Co-op can be to their communities.

The store is celebrating 15 years in the village of Roseisle this year, and an unexpected consequence of the coronavirus is that it has been serving more customers than ever.

Roseisle Store manager Cindy McDonald said there has been a noticeable increase in support since March.

"We've easily doubled, if not tripled, in the amount of local supporters in the past few months," she said. "It used to be I could count on one hand the people that grab a grocery cart and fill it. Now I couldn't count them on two hands."

The store has struggled for years, especially in the winter when it can't rely on campers visiting Stephenfield Park.

Given that Roseisle is home to around 75 people, McDonald said it makes sense that the store has had trouble staying in the black.

But through dedication, determination, and resourcefulness the store has stayed open despite its challeng-



Store manager Cindy McDonald bakes fresh cinnamon buns daily.

es.

Many people's roots run deep in Roseisle. McDonald was born in the village. Her father was on the Co-op's founding board and also helped build the store.

"It gives you that deeper connection and deeper passion," she said.

And in the time of quarantine, her belief in the need for local access to groceries and other necessities has clearly been validated.

"Right at the beginning was really tricky because the rules changed ev-



STANDARD PHOTOS BY EMILY DISTEFANO

The Roseisle Community Grocery Co-op staff have been working hard to serve an influx of customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured from left, mailman Arie Vreugdenhil (who "makes the mail possible"), longtime customer Jim Colvin, who helped build the store, and manager Cindy McDonald.

ery day," said McDonald.

But the store has always had staples like toilet paper and flour, and it was only out of yeast for one day.

The store is following all provincial regulations and protocols, but because it serves such a small area it is able to offer a more socially distanced experience than stores in larger centres.

"We're naturally quarantined from the rest of the world," McDonald said.

That quality has been attracting more Roseisle residents than ever, as well as seniors and moms shopping with children from nearby communities, many of whom can arrange to have the store all to themselves for a time for even greater peace of mind.

It's the kind of personalized service the store is becoming known for.

The store's efforts to come up with creative solutions to serve its community date back to before COVID-19 struck. McDonald and her staff have been working on creative ways to serve customers for some time.

That's why the store offers items like locally grown beef (from a farm where McDonald's kids work), bison raised only two miles away, and pork from a nearby Hutterite colony.

"Everybody loves to know where you fed the animal that they're eating," said McDonald.

The store has also implemented bulk ordering for a variety of items, including cookie dough.

The store's focus on versatility and personalization has helped keep them busy during the pandemic. They offer online orders via email, as well as de-

livery and pick-up according to customers' needs.

"Some of the changes happened before COVID, but boy did they really benefit us," said McDonald. "In a small town you've got to adjust. Change, and be willing to change again."

Recently, she has started baking pies and meals-to-go for customers to pick up. The store has sold up to 55 pies and 60 meals in one week.

Before social distancing, the store was a vital gathering place for the community. Every morning, a dozen or so gentlemen met for coffee. Regular customers visited to enjoy McDonald's hearty lunches and melt-in-your-mouth cinnamon buns fresh from the oven. And the store hosted all sorts of events, from Canada Day celebrations, to tractor pulls, to painting parties, to breakfast buffets, to game nights.

"You would have a five-year-old playing a game with an eighty-year-old," McDonald said. "I think that's beautiful."

Jim Colvin, a loyal Roseisle Community Grocery Co-op customer who is part of the coffee crowd, said he is looking forward to the store opening up its indoor dining area again when it is allowed to do so.

Colvin was raised in the Roseisle area, and also helped to build the store. It is important to him to support the community, which is why he has done the grocery shopping for his family of four at the store since it opened.

Building Permits

Reminder:

Residents in the Town and RM must obtain building permits prior to starting construction. Permits are required for any pools, decks, additions, temporary buildings, structural work, foundation work, renovations over \$20,000 and new buildings over 120 sq feet. Call our offices to find out if you need a permit for your project.

Town of Carman 204-745-2443,
RM of Dufferin 204-745-2301

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