

Aaron Rodgers Small-Business COVID-19 Fund



Contact:

David Little, NVCF executive vice president, communications. Email: dlittle@nvcf.org. Phone: 530-891-1150, ext. 300.

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Aaron Rodgers has long been recognized as a wizard of the Hail Mary pass on the football field. Many businesses in Butte County benefitted from the philanthropic version of a Hail Mary pass, also launched by Aaron.

“I can honestly say that we would not be here right now without the help from you guys (NVCF) and Aaron,” said Chris Yarbrough, the owner of Kona’s sandwiches and bakery in downtown Chico. “It was a life-changing thing, and the timing ... we couldn’t have been more on the ropes physically and fiscally, any more than we were at that point.

“The timing was like it was scripted for a savior to come in and do something miraculous — and that’s what happened.”

Eighty small businesses were given grants the first week in March. For most of them, it meant at least three months of rent, enough to get them to June when the state relaxed its pandemic restrictions on restaurants and retail.

An additional 79 received grants that were awarded in May. The total granted in the two rounds was \$1.6 million.

Three months after the first round, several businesses reported the timing and the impact of the grants were both tremendous.

Several businesses said they were wondering whether to cut jobs, hours of operation or even close entirely when the grant came.

“When we found out we were one of the people getting the grants, it brought us to tears,” said Jesus Plascencia, owner of Pueblito’s restaurant in Chico. “It’s given us a second chance and motivated us to keep going, to not give up.”

“It brought us a lot of hope, a lot of life,” said Gentry Power of Bidwell Perk.

“It’s hard to put into words what it meant to us,” said Nancy Carlson, owner of Sweet Chico Confections. “It, uh, it kind of makes you tear up a little.”

“We were so excited because it changed so much for us,” said Kim Jamison, owner of The Watchman in downtown Chico. “It paid for three months of rent, which is a substantial amount that let us save money to be able to build our business and to run it the rest of the year.”

Business owners noted the impact on not only their businesses, but on the entire area.

“Pretty much this entire street got the grant. It’s just incredible,” said Jamison of The Watchman, which is on Third Street.

“It was a huge shot of adrenaline that never went away after that (call),” said Yarbrough of Kona’s. “It made everybody feel better and it was contagious in a good way. We had people coming in, just sticking their head in the door, giving us a thumbs up and a big yell or an ‘It made my day!’ That kind of stuff is just unbelievable.”