

## Organizations

Ayr Hill Garden Club

Freeman Store & Museum

Rustic Love Vienna

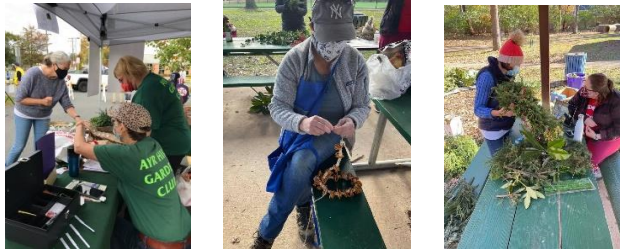
Vienna Business Association (VBA)

Committee for Helping Others (CHO)

**Ayr Hill Garden Club** conquers Covid... When the entire world shut down with the coronavirus, Ayr Hill Garden club members, some of us, decided with social distancing and wearing masks, we would continue to maintain many community gardens. We really didn't feel we had a choice as the gardens had to be maintained. Working in teams of 3-4 spaced at more than 10 feet, we were able to continue weeding, planting vegetables, and harvesting. On the Freeman Store grounds we harvested peanuts, potatoes, and even tomatoes, peppers, okra, etc. The Garden Club maintains 6 gardens in the town of Vienna, including the Bike Trail garden next to Whole Foods for 40 years. The Club held a virtual flower show, virtual plant sale with pick up, a virtual holiday tea, and continue our programming virtually. One day we will meet in person, but we will continue to care for our town gardens any way we are able to do so.

Nancy Moats, Ayr Hill Garden Club

February 2021



It all started with a jigsaw puzzle. When everything shut down in March 2020 and we all stayed home, we looked to comfort activities and jigsaw puzzles were very much in demand. We had so many puzzles in the **Freeman Store** and desperately wanted to make them available for the community. Building a website for an online store seemed the best way to do that and it was the beginning of our 1<sup>st</sup> popup online sale. All purchases were bagged and available on our front porch for safe, contact-less pickup. This led to additional merchandise online and more popup sales throughout the year so the community could continue to purchase their favorite Vienna and Virginia themed items.

Freeman Store & Museum, Storekeeper

Historic Vienna, Inc.

February 2021



## Rustic Love Vienna

As the COVID-19 pandemic escalated in Vienna in 2020, area restaurants struggled with plummeting sales, first responders were working in increasingly stressful and dangerous health conditions, and many families faced financial uncertainty and food-insecurity because of massive lay-offs and a faltering economy. In the early months of the pandemic, the Vienna VA Foodies Facebook group pivoted from a restaurant review page to a clearinghouse for donations to the struggling area food industry. Restaurants would then use those funds to create meals for first responders and the food-insecure in our community.

Seeing how the multi-tiered donation structure of the Foodies new mission helped so many local families and businesses, Rustic Love Vienna was formed by a local family as a way to help financially contribute to the cause. Small wooden yard signs adorned with a simple heart were manufactured in a Vienna backyard and sold to local residents, with the proceeds going directly to the Foodies mission. The idea caught on. Demand for the signs surged, and by the end of 2020, more than 1,000 signs had been created by more than 100 volunteers from the Vienna area. Adults, teens and kids -- Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, High School volunteer groups, individual adults and kids, entire families, and local businesses all volunteered their time to help build yard signs, Christmas ornaments, clothing and the ever-present accessory of the pandemic - face masks - all with the Rustic Love Vienna heart logo. Vienna residents donated generously to the cause - more than \$70,000 was raised in just the last half of 2020.

A strong sense of community was found around the Town's embrace of the simple Rustic Love Vienna heart. The heart signs could be found all over town, in front of homes and businesses and on people's cars and clothing, reminding everyone that we were townspeople taking care of our neighbors and our struggling local businesses.



March 2021



As the Executive Director of the **Vienna Business Association (VBA)**, I have had a unique and up-close view of the COVID pandemic and its massive impact on the local businesses in Vienna. My experience has been one of heartache and compassion but also of immense pride and admiration for both the local business owners and for the Vienna community.

I am so amazed at all of the extreme efforts our local businesses have been putting forth during the pandemic. From day 1 it was un-imaginably challenging for businesses as they were forced to change their entire business practices, hours, and safety protocols to ensure customers and staff remained safe, all while attempting to generate enough sales to stay afloat.



Locally owned restaurants were hit incredibly hard with long hours and constantly evolving methodologies for bringing local food to local mouths. Outside seating popped up all over, take-out & curbside pick-up became the new "dine in" and picnics on the Town Green and driveway gatherings were all the rage as the Vienna community came out to support Vienna eateries. Many restaurants went to astonishing lengths to provide engaging, yet socially distant outdoor seating. Sure, there was a pandemic ravaging the planet, but we needed each other...we needed our community ties more than ever. The outdoor dining options allowed us this privilege...this normalcy. Spring, summer, and fall made it easy for those who wanted to dine outside, even enticing, and then winter settled in.

Northern Virginia freezing temps and dark days normally drive the Vienna community to gather inside in groups for meals and happy hours at our many locally owned establishments. Alas, COVID has crushed our dreams of shoulder-to-shoulder indoor gatherings but has created yet another evolution of dining... Outdoor and Bundled Up! While many of our restaurants have decided to adjust to pick-up, delivery, and limited indoor seating options only, there are others that have decided to embrace the cold and create cozy cold weather dining adventures outdoors. *Enter #BundleUp.*

Leading the "Bundle Up" initiative in Vienna is the Caboose Brewing Company. They are providing cold weather gathering spaces with fire pits, blankets, heaters, and warm cozy cocktails, but they are not alone. Bear Branch Tavern, Bazin's On Church, Blend 111, Clarity, Ristorante Bonaroti, Zenola, Cafe Renaissance, Anita's and Vienna Inn, are a few of our locally owned Vienna businesses that are bringing wonderful outdoor dining to our community. Baby it's cold outside, but I still want to support local restaurants...*#BundleUp*



Restaurants are not the only industry severely impacted by the pandemic. Personal services such as hair and nail salons, massage studios, fitness and spa services were shut down completely for a few months and were finally able to open up in the summer at a limited capacity with very strict safety mandates. Retailers cautiously opened at limited capacity, and often by appointment only. Locally owned Bards Alley Book Shop accepted appointments and would allow no more than 10 people in the shop at a time, including the staff. Bards had a great online and phone-in ordering process and offered your books for pick-up on their patio. They also teamed up with locally owned business neighbor bikes@vienna to deliver books via bike messenger to folks who lived in town. This is just one example of how many businesses came together to support one another.

Businesses have been so drastically affected and the financial impact has been devastating, even with the PPP and Cares Act loans from the SBA, Fairfax County and Town of Vienna. So often, our small and locally owned and operated businesses live close to the break-even line, and the drastic reduction of customers/sales can be life and business altering. That said, there is beauty and good that has risen from this devastation.

The local business reaction to this challenging time, coupled with the community love and support for our Vienna businesses has created an amazing support network for our restaurants, for our retailers and for our personal care services.... We have chosen to shop, eat and support local. We have chosen to look first to our local businesses before heading to Amazon... We have chosen to rally together and build-up our community... We have chosen, *businesses and citizens both*, to raise up our local community and

economy and make the choice to look first to our small and locally owned businesses before shopping elsewhere... We have chosen to Shop Local & Shop Vienna! We are AMAZING!

Creating local buzz & marketing and generating enthusiasm to shop local does not just happen... There have been a few key resources in Vienna that have really bolstered the economy and created fantastic local business awareness during this pandemic.

**“Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping”, Fred Rogers**

• **Vienna VA Foodies:** Started in late 2019 by Vienna locals Lydia Russo and Chris Drinkuth, the Vienna Foodies Facebook group has grown to over 10k members and is one of most important marketing tools for all greater Vienna restaurants and community members. The Foodies group has done an outstanding job promoting restaurants and all things food and drink through photos and positive comments supplied by the whole community! It was no longer acceptable to pick up food or dine alfresco and not show it off on the Foodies group. We took pictures...lots and lots of pictures, and we posted them...we all did! It was wonderful and it really helped bring much needed attention to the local eateries. Outstanding free marketing by the most supportive community ever.

In addition to the wonderful restaurant support, Foodies was (is) a tremendous supporter of food insecure families, first responders, doctors and nurses, teachers, and a number of other well-deserving people in our community. Foodies has been amazing. “Who are the people in your neighborhood?” Just click on Vienna VA Foodies Facebook group and you will see...

• **Town of Vienna Economic Development Division:** In late 2019, the Town of Vienna hired their first ever Economic Development Manager, Natalie Monkou, who was so excited to jump in and help existing, and potential businesses thrive in our 22180 community. Having met with Natalie many times early on, it was apparent that she had big plans for growing the visibility of Vienna businesses and our overall economy. She was hitting the bricks fast by meeting with lots of business owners, the VBA Board, and other stakeholders to share her vision and gather thoughts & suggestions. As the VBA Director, I was so excited to have Natalie join the Town and was really looking forward to working with her. Vienna was (is) great, our businesses were solid & doing well.

“Sigh” ... Enter March 2020...enter COVID-19... Enter chaos and life-altering challenges. Natalie had only just begun her journey of creating the, much anticipated, Economic Development Authority in Vienna when, whammo, this god-awful pandemic hit, and “pivot” became the most popular word in the business world.

But pivot she did. Without a beat, our first ever, brand new, Economic Development Manager got to work researching safety and financial resources for our Town businesses. She spent 100s of hours on calls with County, State and Federal agencies researching resources and guidelines for our businesses. The Town of Vienna now had a staff advocate specifically for local business, and it couldn't have happened at a more opportune time.

Natalie Monkou, Economic Development Manager for Vienna, has gone above and beyond to fight for the success of local businesses. You don't always know it's her, and she doesn't beg for acknowledgement. What she does do is really go “to the mat” for our local entrepreneurs and assist local businesses with COVID financial assistance, outdoor seating and retail permits and overall hand-holding as they attempt to navigate the new “normal” during this pandemic. I'm sure she had no idea that this is what she would be faced with when she joined the Town of Vienna, but I am absolutely sure that Vienna would be worse-off without her.

• **Vienna Business Association :** Since August of 2012, the VBA has been a true champion of locally owned and small businesses for the greater Vienna area. As the Community Chamber of Commerce, we are here to serve and support our local businesses, nonprofit organizations, as well as our community. As a founding member of the VBA, I have had the immense pleasure of working with some amazing folks who came together to create a Chamber of that would specifically support our unique Town and businesses. As a prior business owner in Vienna (The Artful Gift Shop on Church St.), I was thrilled to be

part of the forming of the VBA. Small Vienna businesses needed an organization that represented them, not a large corporate Chamber, and we created just that...

As a member-based business association, the VBA's primary focus is normally on the promotion, education, and success of our members. That said, when the pandemic hit, we quickly broadened our scope (pivoted, if you will) to be a resource for all Vienna businesses and service organizations, whether they were members or not. The VBA decided that we would do anything we could to help the businesses and our community survive and thrive during this pandemic!

**Below are some of the noteworthy efforts the VBA rolled out during the pandemic:**

We immediately set-up a COVID resource page on our website that included health and financial guidance from agencies such as the CDC, the SBA and Governor Northam's office (to name a few). We would send weekly resource email updates to all businesses in Town each week. Our goal was to keep everyone informed of the changing safety measures and phases and to provide as much assistance as possible in navigating the financial resources available.

We established the Vienna VA Business News Facebook group to provide free community marketing for all businesses in the greater Vienna area.

We established a COVID Quick Assistance Grant fund out of the VBA Foundation and awarded 8 grants to local nonprofits who were providing health and human services during the pandemic.

We hosted zoom meetings on current topics such as COVID protocols, anti-racism for businesses, pivoting in a pandemic, League of Women Voters, to name a few.

We collaborated with Vienna Economic Development Division to bring the "Road to Recovery" zoom series to our businesses which featured resources and information to help assist in the recovery from the pandemic

We distributed masks donated by Wolf Trap Foundation to local businesses and teachers.



We cohosted a virtual Mayor and Town Council Candidate Forum with NEVCA to ensure the Vienna community was fully educated on the platforms of all candidates running for office during times of social distancing.

We hosted the Feeding Families 5k with Caffe Amouri and raised 10.2k to feed over 368 families, through grocery cards and restaurants meals purchased from Vienna shops.

We teamed with McCabe's Printing Group to bring no and low-cost signage to businesses with curb-side & pick-up options.

We provided over 300 new residents with a VBA Welcome Bag which includes many free and discounted gifts from VBA members.

We established the Corporate Responsibility Award and presented the first ever to Lydia Russo for all of her outstanding efforts with the Vienna VA Foodies.

We created a nonprofit guide that is posted on the VBA website and distributed to all new residents through the VBA Welcome Bags each month.

We reduced our fees by 20% for new members and we allowed our current members to extend their payments our pay a reduced fee.



We constantly promoted businesses through photos and videos on our social media outlets.

*Phew, we have been busy!*

**The pleasure is all mine.**

Needless to say, I (we) have been remarkably busy for the last year. As of last count, we have had 60 new members join since the start of the pandemic, so I guess we will keep doing what we do and keep supporting our community as best we can. We are always open for suggestions, and have many new things coming up this year, so stay tuned!

Serving as the Executive Director for the Vienna Business Association this last year has been the most rewarding work of my life. Being able to help small businesses in such a dire time has been so emotionally and professionally rewarding. It has been an absolute honor. I am so proud of the VBA and the of the dedicated board and our wonderful members that have been here all along or have joined us this last year. I look forward to seeing you all in person some day soon!

Peggy James, Executive Director, Vienna Business Association

February 2021



**CHO – The Committee for Helping Others ---Operations during the 2020/2021 Pandemic**

On March 13, 2020, our normal operations at CHO stopped. We were all sheltering in place---it was no longer safe to meet clients and we had to rethink our entire operation.

Emergency Services was probably impacted the most with an increased workload. Through Fairfax County, CHO was chosen to be one of the organizations to dispense the government funded CARES program checks to help those directly impacted by the Covid virus. The county told us who to help and how much of the CARES money to make available to them for rent, utilities and health care bills. This job, along with taking care of our local clients needing help, impacted our Emergency Services workers and our Treasurer who had to issue the checks and monitor the dispensing of this government money. We are still part of this program now in February, 2021.

Our requests for rental assistance and utility payments grow daily as business is not back to normal and clients are working less hours, if at all. Luckily for CHO, our donations have been exceptionally high and have helped us maintain our usual standards of helping.

Clothes Closet operations closed down completely in March except for disaster help like house fires.

They have recently begun helping clients on a very restricted basis. No client has been allowed inside the facility---clothing has either been packed for them by a volunteer or containers of clothing have been carried outside for them to choose from. Donations have been severely restricted as with less people coming to us, we have nowhere to sort and store new items. Volunteers inside the building have been limited to 3.

Food Closet operations moved to food gift cards in March which were mailed to the clients. Food was also included in the CARES program so we could use some of the CARES money for families directly affected by Covid. At the beginning of July, we reopened with one volunteer in the building at a time to pack a food order which was labeled with the client's name and put outside the door for non-contact pickup. Donations of food items have been very good as have donations of food grocery cards so we have been able to maintain our operations.

Furniture Program---this program has shut down except for emergencies. Delivery of a needed item is handled by one volunteer and only a few donated items have been accepted. This program will reopen when it is safe for the volunteers.

Christmas Store---this year instead of over 100 volunteers, we had 13 volunteers manning a drive-thru Store where clients were presented with food gift cards for their holiday meal and store gift cards for gifts for their children. The community really came through and provided us with enough gift cards to help a total of 203 families (722 people) for the holidays. The community provided us with the \$34,570 to make this possible.

Meals on Wheels was taken over by Fairfax County employees who delivered the food to clients.

February 2021

