



Discover The Difference

A Quarterly Publication of the Figueroa Corridor Partnership Business Improvement District

These Undergrads Swapped Summer Fun for Pandemic-Inspired Startups



In mid-April, less than a month after the coronavirus first took hold in the U.S. and colleges sent students home, Chandler Goodman and John-Crawford Counts launched their contact-free business selling essentials like meat, pasta, and sanitary gloves. Their Pop Up Pantry, which was founded out of the Goodman family's window tinting and paint store in Oklahoma City, allowed customers to either shop for items through the company's website or

request goods at the drive-up window. Goodman or Counts would assemble the order and place it in the trunk of a person's car. Pop Up Pantry's inventory came mainly from Sysco, a food distributor where Counts's father works.

While the business is no longer operating--it shut down after the window tinting shop reopened in late April--it grossed \$7,900 in sales over the period. Goodman says the money mostly went back into buying inventory, so they didn't book a profit. But that wasn't the point anyway, say the founders. "We were giving people a safe alternative during this crazy time."

They weren't alone. Faced with the devastation wrought by the coronavirus, which is currently resurging in Southern and Western states in the U.S., a number of college students are trading their typical summer jobs for social entrepreneurship.

While the college founders say they don't expect these pandemic-inspired companies to last beyond the summer--and indeed, some, like Pop Up Pantry, have already closed--they say the experience of starting a company and helping their communities has proved invaluable. Plus, some say it whet their appetite for future opportunities in entrepreneurship.

Future Founders

In Los Angeles, Claire Monro and Claire Fisher are turning T-shirts into small-business grant money. After witnessing the plight of local businesses near their University of Southern California campus, on March 24 the two business majors created a souvenir T-shirt, which says, "Fight on...line" on the front and "USC spring 2020" on the back. They planned to direct the proceeds to local businesses.

The duo began posting their fundraiser on social media, which helped to spread the campaign, and got their shirts in the school's online bookstore. It also landed the attention of a local nonprofit, which helped open up another avenue to the founders.

In late April, the Figueroa Corridor Partnership Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at promoting and developing the neighborhood around USC, got wind of the project. The foundation offered to match the money Monro and Fisher made, up to \$10,000, and turn the proceeds into grants for small businesses in the area. Collectively, they've helped make \$18,199 available to area businesses.

The deadline to apply for the matching funds ended last Friday, so businesses should find out soon if they get any aid through the program, says Monro, who along with Fisher graduated in May. "I can't wait to see how the money can help [businesses] during this difficult time," she adds.

Monro says she and her co-founder hope to be back in the fall with more product to sell. They'll trade T-shirts for sweatshirts, however.

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