



Stories of Triumph

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Business Development Board of Martin County

"A lot of people have ideas, but there are few who decide to do something about them now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. But today. The true entrepreneur is a doer, not a dreamer."
—Nolan Bushnell

Fast-tracked food, provision distribution efforts forged in restaurant life



Thriving in the restaurant environment commands decisiveness, speed and attention-to-detail. When COVID-19 grinded everything to a near halt, these qualities helped two local business people rapidly launch delivery operations to respond to the public's rising list of immediate needs.

Today, even though one suspended operations and the other continues, both endeavors embody the can-do spirit and community-mindedness of our local entrepreneurs.

Kyle G's Prime Seafood & Steaks

The day Gov. DeSantis closed restaurants for dine-in service, Kyle Greene had 150 employees.

"Big staff and a big team with lots of overhead," he says.

Knowing his restaurant's location at 10900 S. Ocean Drive on Hutchinson Island is inherently limited to pull off a brisk drive-up/drop-off business, he got creative to keep at least half his staff working. First, he partnered with [25 United](#), the Stuart-based disaster relief effort that led the local Bahamian recovery post-Dorian. Next, he tapped his executive chef to create ready-to-eat meals for reasonable prices and served them out of the Martin County Fairgrounds.

He supplemented existing inventory with orders from his distributor, Cheney Brothers, which helped that company keep more of its people working.

"We fed 5,000 in the first week and a half," says Kyle Greene. "Mostly traditional, home-style meals that are easy to make and feed a lot of people."

Having since suspended the distribution effort, he's currently "focused on getting reopened," he says. "We don't know when we're going to be able to open for dine-in service. We don't know when we'll be able to do anything. We're kind of on hold at this point."

Joan K. Goodrich, executive director of the Business Development Board of Martin County, anticipates a solid recovery for Kyle and his team based on their strong reputation in the community. She noted that after starting in restaurants at age 16 washing dishes, he eventually opened [Kyle G's](#) less than three years ago in the very location where he was once a cook.

"What an impressive and determined entrepreneurial leader," Goodrich says of the 34-year-old. "He's moved from working as a line cook at this location when it was Rotties Restaurant, to an executive chef when it was Pietro's and now having his own restaurant. I believe I speak for countless locals when I say we can't wait to see how he'll bring this beloved restaurant back to even greater success when conditions lift."

Robert Erneston Produce

Ralph Venuti honed his work ethic in the restaurant businesses as well. His

sense of urgency kicked in with his role with Robert Erneston Produce, a wholesale fruits and produce distributor, as the schools and restaurants they supplied closed or slowed down. That's when he and his coworkers united behind the idea of transitioning the business to direct-to-consumer retail.



"I've been in the restaurant business my entire life and I know you have to adjust to the current environment," says Ralph, 44.

The company, based in Stuart and family-owned for nearly 100 years, is currently providing drive-up service from four locations. Customers place orders online or Facebook, drive up during an allotted time on a selected day, and Robert Erneston Produce staff loads up their car. Items for order include produce, chicken, ground beef, dairy, eggs, bleach and yes, toilet paper (while supplies last).

“These are the things that people are struggling to find,” Ralph says.

Goodrich praised the company's quick shift and rapid response to market needs.

"As much as we in business like to talk about the power of disruptors in the economy, we have to really applaud the adjustors as the virus and its response have proved a bigger disruption than anything most of us have ever seen," she says. "That makes the fast action of companies like Robert Erneston Produce so impressive. We've heard from many in our community about what a lifesaver this service has been."

They’re at four different pick-up locations twice a week, including:

- Seabranh Center, 5667 SE Crooked Oak Ave., Hobe Sound
- Covenant Fellowship Baptist Church, 2880 SE Aster Lane, Stuart
- Christ Fellowship Tradition, 10250 SW Village Parkway, Port St. Lucie
- Grace Immanuel Bible Church, 17475 Jonathan Drive, #5893, Jupiter

Owner Bobby Ernesto, whose father started the company in 1923, is a strong believer in God and fiercely dedicated to his employees, Ralph says.

“(Owner Bobby Ernesto), his main concern is always, ‘How am I going to continue to employ these families? How am I going to take care of them and this community?’”

Although conditions have forced them to cut back hours, Robert Erneston Produce’s fewer than 50 employees are grateful to remain working, says Ralph, and so is the public they’re serving.

“We get letters, thank-you cards—people are super grateful,” he says. “I love the adapting part—we’re a team. Our guys aren’t just loaders or stuck in the back of the kitchen. They’re out meeting with the customers and experiencing this. We’re all learning from this and we’re gonna be a better wholesaler after this."

Ralph says his coworkers understand that the most important thing their customers can come away with is a renewed sense of hope, which they strive to provide with a kind word or gesture—regardless of any barriers between them.

"We're wearing masks, but the part I don't like about the masks is that they can't see our smiles," Ralph adds. "Smiles relieve them and remind them that they're not going through this alone."

Call the 211 Help Line for families needing resources

Small (Business) but Mighty

The Business Development Board of Martin County is showcasing these inspiring efforts of local business leaders, innovators and entrepreneur in a reoccurring feature called “Stories of Triumph.”





If you or someone you know is using their small business to do something innovative and inspiring to help our community through this crisis, please [email](#) me so we can share their Story of Triumph.

Joan

Joan K. Goodrich
Executive Director
Business Development Board of Martin County

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