

## Local businesses acclimating to vaccine passport system, says Chamber

By Rob Paul

When the Government of Ontario implemented a vaccine passport system on September 22, it began requiring some businesses to have patrons provide proof of vaccination and identification to enter their businesses.

Proof of vaccination has been required in many different indoor settings, but more specifically has made its impact felt on restaurants and bars where customers can only be inside if they've received two doses of the vaccine.

Though businesses aren't back to normal as COVID-19 continues to affect them, the implementation of the vaccine passport system has allowed for safer settings and reduced indoor restrictions, especially for restaurants.

The Caledon Chamber of Commerce has worked to support businesses in Caledon through the unknown of the pandemic and that includes ensuring they fully understand the current guidelines of how they must operate when open.

They've also been a sounding board for businesses in Town who have struggled throughout, according to Chamber President Anthony Caputo, which has given them a good grasp on the experience that businesses have gone through with things such as the vaccine passport and how residents of Caledon have acclimated to it since its implementation.

It's not ideal for businesses to be the ones in charge of ensuring individuals who come in are fully vaccinated, but Caputo says he's heard from many businesses on the topic, and they'll do what's necessary to operate after struggling through the pandemic for nearly two years.

"For the most part it's been a positive," said Caputo. "A lot of businesses don't care right now about the passports and having to check them because they just want things to go back to normal. They know they probably won't make up the money they lost over the last 18 months, but they need to survive, and they need to do something. So, for the most part it's been a well-received response."

Caputo knows every business wants to do what is safe and follow the rules as best they can; however, he also understands with what they've dealt with since March of 2020, it's hard for them to decline business when they're in desperate situations.

"They want to follow the rules, but because everyone has lost so much money, I don't think businesses are wanting to discriminate against someone for not having a passport? This is from talking to restaurant owners and other businesses in town," he said. "So, yes, it's great and they know that everyone's been double vaccinated and we're getting back to normal, but at the same time, these businesses have starved for a long time and they're going to have trouble turning down someone for not having a vaccine."

"Everyone needs to make money to survive right now. Will a person without the vaccine or just one dose be treated a little differently? Yeah, the businesses are taking the proper precautions to make sure they don't infect someone else. It's a really touchy subject when it comes to businesses, and small businesses especially."

Without a clear and regulated system in place to check for vaccinations? though the government is aiming for QR code system by October 22? Caputo does fear it puts a lot of pressure on local business owners to take charge of a situation they didn't ask for when all they want is for everyone to be safe as they open.

"Do I blame businesses if they're not screening everyone the way the government thinks it should be done? No, I don't blame them, they need to survive and it's a difficult situation," he said. "Should this onus be on the business owners? No, I think this is all level of government passing the buck down to everyone else so they don't look like the bad guys, even though that shouldn't matter."

"I'm the type of guy who says it the way it is, but I look at both sides of the argument and you can understand the points of both

sides. But I just feel that there's so much division right now that we're getting to the level of the U.S. and it's not good, it's not healthy at all. We just want our businesses to be safely open.?

Businesses aren't operating exactly the way they were pre-pandemic, but this is the closest they've ever been to normal and Caputo knows everything is trending in the right direction in terms of economic recovery.

?Things are getting back to where they were, especially with the restaurants,? he said. ?They're not at full capacity, but it was so difficult before. Their bottom line and expenses weren't as bad because they didn't have servers to pay, but at the same time they didn't have the amount of traffic they would usually have. So, yes, they're bouncing back, but are they going to make up what they lost? Probably not, but at least they're on a roll now where they can feel normal again.?

Despite some objection to the proof of vaccine system in Ontario, Caputo has heard mainly positive coming from businesses and it is rare that an issue is caused due to the situation.

?There's an understanding from both the parties involved,? he said. ?It's really just a small group of people that are not getting vaccinated and they're the ones who are the most vocal about the passports. Other than that, everyone else is complying and not making trouble with anybody.

?At the end of the day, it's the rules. You can't blame the business owners for following the rules. I'm a big believer in freedom of choice and you have the choice to take the vaccine or not to take the vaccine. You don't have the choice of killing someone for not taking the vaccine, but that's the choice that someone wants to make. Again, if they don't want to go into a restaurant as a result of choosing not to get vaccinated, that's their choice. If they want to go in, then you know there's rules that they need to follow for everyone's safety.?