

Resiliency Academy

Helping Granite Staters develop business and community resiliency plans

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STUDLEY'S IN DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER IS A FAMILY-OWNED FLORIST, GARDEN CENTER AND LANDSCAPE COMPANY, STARTED IN 1928.

In just a few years, [Studley Flowers](#) in downtown Rochester will celebrate its 100th anniversary. The family-owned florist, garden center and landscape company was started in 1928.

Brothers David and Jeffrey Meulenbroek took over the business from their parents, who had acquired it in 1971. Alongside the brothers, Jeffrey's wife Molly serves as an owner and operator.

"We had not really thought

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of resiliency before the pandemic, although when we did take over the business in 2008 we were in the start of the Great Recession so we did have to think a lot differently about our business at that time,” says Molly Meulenbroek, who participated in Resiliency Academy in 2021.

Offered by UNH Extension and the [N.H. Small Business Development Center](#) (SBDC), Resiliency Academy is designed for small businesses, community leaders, volunteers, municipal officials, economic development professionals and anyone interested in economic recovery.

Through a webinar, a virtual training and in-person tours of New Hampshire communities, participants learn strategies for responding and adapting to and recovering from the challenges of a sudden shock such as a fire, natural disaster or pandemic. Both businesses and communities need resiliency planning to rebound and be prepared for future disruptions, but a 2020 N.H. SBDC state-wide survey found that only 19% of businesses in the state had resiliency plans in place pre-pandemic.

For owners like the Meulenbroeks, that includes addressing the



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physical aspects of their aging building — considering what updates should be made structurally — as well as the upgrades needed for virtual components of the business, like cybersecurity and security compliance for credit card processing.

While continuing to work on the plan for Studley's, Molly Meulenbroek says that being involved with Rochester's Main Street and local civic matters has made a big difference. "I had strong community connections and networks before the pandemic, which really helped us get through the pandemic ... It's a good reminder that when you're thinking about resiliency your business network is important to cultivate; it's important to know who the experts are — who you can call when you need extra help," she says.



EXTENSION AND THE N.H. SBDC HAVE FORGED PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS LIKE INDONESIA COMMUNITY CONNECT, INC. (ICC) IN SOMERSWORTH.

North Country Rising

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across New Hampshire, businesses were forced to close, tourists stopped visiting and locals avoided dining out. With regulations and conditions rapidly

changing, small businesses grappled with planning for an uncertain future.

To address these challenges and with support of CARES Act funding, the [North Country Council](#) Economic Development District and Regional Planning Commission are creating a long-term COVID-19 recovery and resiliency plan called [North Country Rising](#). Members of this initiative attended Resiliency Academy and have adopted Extension's resiliency framework and recommendations on inclusion, innovation and networking while engaging over 200 people in their region. Extension state specialist Molly Donovan says, "This is a tremendous outcome of our teaching."

The North Country Council has been gathering insights from businesses, non-profits, civic institutions, schools and social venues that have been impacted by the pandemic to inform the plan.



MOLLY DONOVAN (LEFT) AND LIZ GRAY.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, New Hampshire's unemployment rate was

16% in April 2020, compared to the national average of 14.8%. In April 2021, New Hampshire's unemployment rate dropped to 2.8%, compared to a national average of 6.1%. Those numbers are promising, but many other factors — skyrocketing inflation, panic buying, supply chain issues, an aging workforce and labor shortage — still prove challenging for communities.

By intentionally thinking about setbacks that may occur in the future, communities can leverage resources and, like a phoenix

emerging from ashes, rise again.

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