



Bend Cares

Dear Bend Community,

My name is Mindy and I am the Executive Director of the Downtown Bend Business Association (DBBA). I'm writing this personal letter to you because I wanted to share with you why the Bend Cares program is close to my heart.

I come from a long line of entrepreneurs. Both my parents owned small businesses and both my sets of grandparents owned small businesses. I understand in a very real way the narrow line that many small business owners walk. The difference in a good day or a bad day of sales might mean the difference between top ramen for dinner or meat and vegetables for dinner. The difference of a good week or a bad week might decide if a child of a local business owner can afford to play sports or go to camp. The impact of a bad season of sales for a small business owner might mean that a family loses their home, or has to borrow money from a family member. Owning and operating a small business is about as 'real' as it gets. You are not guaranteed a paycheck; you put in long hours and a tremendous amount of time and effort. It's not easy and it's not for the faint of heart. The circumstances and culture surrounding a small business can have a negative or positive impact on the business itself and whether or not it succeeds. Some of these external circumstances can include things like parking availability, customer discomfort in front or around your place of business, safety concerns, or traffic. As a business owner, it can feel frustrating at times when your business (and family) bears the impact of these things that are out of your control.

When I was a child, my family came upon some hard times. My mother lost her business and she had a difficult time finding sustaining work. Off and on for years we went to the food bank a lot, and the church brought us food. We struggled to get by. I remember being in elementary school and being embarrassed to pull out my packed lunch because I thought the other kids would somehow know that it was donated food. Things got worse. My sister, mother and I lived out of our car. I got ready for Jr. High School in the back of a Ford Escort.

As an adult I struggled to put myself through school, and I've managed to open and successfully run 3 different small businesses. I've worked incredibly hard, and I have also been very lucky.

Two of the things that I am most passionate about right now in my life are entrepreneurship and (what I like to call) the 'power of one'. This power of one, to me, represents the immeasurable impact that one person can have on the world. The power isn't in huge organizations or billions of dollars – the power is in each of us. In the way you greet someone, how you steward nature, where you spend your money, where you give your time, the degree of authenticity that you bring to your everyday life, how you treat others who are different than you. It all matters. You can't go a day without impacting the world around you.

This is why I love the Bend Cares program – it involves two of my innate passions. Care for small business owners, and care for community members experiencing hardship. The Bend Cares program recognizes the need for local small business owners to have clean, safe storefronts and streets and it also recognizes the need for each of us to give responsibly to those experiencing hardship in our Bend community.

There is a saying that I love... *“If you are up right now, enjoy it, because you will experience being down again in your future. If you are down right now, be patient, there is another up in your future.”* We all experience ups and downs. We are all so much more similar than we are different. I believe that when I am up, it is my job to help those that are in a down swing, and when I am down, it is my honor to accept help from those that are up. Bend Cares offers a way to give and get help, and that is why I adore this program.

Thank you so much for reading my letter and allowing me to share my story with you.

Mindy Aisling
Executive Director
Downtown Bend