

15 MINUTES

Providing a safety net

After the Camp Fire ignited, Chicostart knew it had to open its doors as soon as possible, says Director Wendy Porter. Whether it was to offer a space in which to connect with one another or to wifi, transition their phone lines or get some work done amid the chaos, entrepreneurs found they could turn to the business incubator to regroup. Now, Chicostart—which provides shared office and meeting space at City Hall—has joined a task force to tackle one of the most important post-fire jobs: ensuring the economic vitality of the Ridge. Businesses seeking assistance can go to buttecountyrecovers.org or chicostart.com for resources. Earlier this week, Porter and Chicostart Operations Manager Timothy Sharkey sat down with the CN&R to discuss their efforts.

How many Ridge businesses are at ChicoStart right now?

Sharkey: It's about 15 different businesses currently that are in here out of the Paradise [area]. We have a construction company, a phone answering service, accountants, environmental services ... an attorney.

Porter: And we have a handful of software programmers, tech professionals that work remotely for companies in the Bay Area.

What is the task force about?

Porter: That business task force has been critical for our collaboration and to kind of help it go smoothly. It started out a little bit more small, where it was just the Chico Chamber, Paradise Chamber, Chicostart, the county and the [Chico State Center for Economic Development] and 3CORE. And then ... when the [U.S. Small Business Administration] got here, we pulled their representatives in, and the city's.

Sharkey: Salesforce ... donated 50 [software] licenses [for all the different agencies] to put together a CRM, customer relationship manage-



PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

ment. So we put them into the system and that's where we can make the referrals. [Initially], we're targeting all the businesses that were service-based—grocery stores, hardware stores, anything that can help support the crews that are going to be up there for the next five, 10 years.

Porter: The businesses that would support the rebuilding.

Sharkey: We have a list of 40 different businesses that were looking for help. We also have a list of at least 40 different facilities and different businesses that have offered up either separate offices, work stations, extra space at their facilities. So now that we're full, it's kind of trying to match these.

What's your role going to be moving forward?

Porter: The unknown is, how long is this going to take? We don't know. We would hope that we would be able to save a business that—they're so distraught over losing their business, over losing their home—they want to leave the area. But [there's] this community that we've kind of put around these victims, saying, "Hey, there's a community of support here. We want to try to get you back on your feet, that's the goal."

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THE GOODS

Milkshakes and doughnuts



by
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Last week, after talking about it for, I don't know, six months at least, my boyfriend, Chuck, and I finally found ourselves at the counter ordering lunch at **The Foodie Cafe**. With its location all the way across town from us at the **Chico Municipal Airport**, it was well worth the wait—and the drive.

My burger and Chuck's pastrami sandwich were both delicious, but what blew us away, truly, were the milkshakes. Chuck ordered a mixed berry and ... wow. Presentation aside—with a doughnut on top!—it was so good I had to get my own, lest I drink half of his, which he declared "the best milkshake I've ever had."

Since **Paradise High** moved into the old **Facebook** building nearby, they saw a need to expand their offerings. And, boy, did they. In addition to opening up a special area for the 11th- and 12th-graders (younger students cannot leave campus), the cafe hired separate staff to work out of a separate kitchen just for them.

Parents were grumbling this week on Facebook about PHS running out of food on the first day, but in addition to Foodie Cafe, **ThirdLove**, whose offices are also nearby, arranges for rotating food trucks available to students and there may be more mobile eateries taking up residence as well.

EAT UP Explore Butte County, the region's tourism outfit, has coordinated with a dozen-plus restaurants—in Chico, Durham and Oroville—to offer special menu items for **Butte County Restaurant Week** (Jan. 18-27). The offerings revolve around the theme of "perfect pairings," which has been interpreted in a variety of ways.

In Chico, the participating restaurants are concentrated in the downtown area and include some fun menu options. **Tres Hombres**, for example, will be pairing a Spanish seafood paella with a traditional margarita, while **La Salles'** pairing is a **Donut Nook** bread pudding and Chicoan **Frank Riley's Ambassador's Irish Coffee**. In Durham, **Almendra Winery & Distillery** will offer three different pairings, two of which are drink flights and the third a "perfect meal for two." The lone participant in Oroville, **The Exchange**, will serve up tomato soup and grilled cheese.

The group's website, explorebuttecounty.com, is difficult to navigate, but does provide more information, with the caveat that pairings are still being added—so check for updates before heading out.

AT LONG LAST It's been nine years since **Hollywood Video** closed and, finally, some action is happening in the old store on East Avenue. City Manager **Mark Orme** tells me it's going to be a showroom for **Courtesy Motors**, whose **BMW**; **Subaru**; and **Buick**, **Cadillac** and **GMC** dealerships are located across Cohasset Road.

DINNER AND A SHOW I had a craving for shawarma recently and satisfied it with lunch at **Cafe Petra**. While he made my food, owner **Mohammed Shabbar** informed me that the Second Street eatery now has **Eastern Star Bellydance** performers in on Saturday evenings. Sounds fun!

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