

'THIS TOO SHALL PASS'

FEATURE

A FEW OF FORT LAUDERDALE'S LONGTIME BUSINESS OWNERS SHARE THEIR ADVICE ON COPING WITH THE COVID-19 CRISIS

WRITER LYNN STOCK



They've weathered economic ups and downs. Their parents and grandparents lived through world wars. And they have lost sleep, worrying about employees and cash flow.

Fort Lauderdale's longtime executives and their businesses have not survived over the years by sheer luck. Their leaders have learned from mistakes, hired good employees and found ways to innovate.

In the midst of sheltering in place and learning far too much about a prevalent and scary virus that has turned our world upside down and sent us hunkering down at home, we asked several Fort Lauderdale business people how they are coping.

Here, we share their lessons learned, concerns and optimism with Go Riverwalk Magazine readers.



PHOTO BY JASON LEIDY

ZOLA KELLER LAS OLAS

818 E. Las Olas Blvd. | (954) 462-3222
www.zolakeller.com

Zola Keller has been in business for 41 years, including 38 years in the same store on Las Olas.

Ave Keller, president of the upscale boutique that showcases his wife Zola's creations and exquisite taste, says the store has never offered online sales ... until now.

"This is much worse than any past event," he said.

"Hurricane threats required us to board up and stay in touch with our market as to when we would open. The spike in interest rates caused us to stay away from purchasing inventory on credit. Tariffs had us looking for new suppliers."

How are your work and your company adapting to this new reality?

We have gone through our large in-store inventory and warehouse and selected bridal and mother of the bride gowns that we are placing on a "sale" page on our website, zolakeller.com, offering significant savings. The gown will be shipped free with a free return sticker. Customers can return the gown within 48 hours. A \$100 coupon will be included towards in store alterations on that garment.

We have never offered online sales.

What changes do you see to your business when the shelter in place is lifted?

We are now looking at continuing limited online sales of high-end bridal and mother of gowns. We will also put in place a policy that allows cancellation/return of gowns purchased for a specific event if that event is cancelled due to governmental restrictions.

How do you see this crisis impacting your industry for the next six months? 18 months?

We are already receiving many requests to reschedule missed appointments and new requests for future appointments. Brides will always want that perfect gown, even if the ceremony happens over Zoom. And other customers tell us they are anticipating the celebrations that will take place when the threat of the novel coronavirus passes. People realize an appointment should be made for after we reopen.

I don't see any significant negative impact to the industry. Of course, sales online versus brick and mortar will continue with services such as in-store alterations being a very important factor.

What are your biggest fears?

I don't see any challenges we can't address.

We are fortunate. Unlike businesses like restaurants, our customers still need that product they were going to purchase while we were closed. Most of the potential sales for that period are pent-up right now, but they'll still be there on the other side of the pandemic.

Of course, this business pause means many of our customers will have had the time frame to purchase their special-occasion gown substantially shortened, perhaps taking away the time we'd need to special order a garment. So we are now purchasing inventory to expand their options for immediate purchase. Normally, this is not the time of year when we would purchase new inventory.

What have you learned that might be helpful to others?

Stay the course if you can. If you had a healthy business before the interruption, a slight modification might be called for but stay within your core business model. Educating the consumer is very expensive.



ROGERS, MORRIS & ZIEGLER

1401 E. Broward Blvd. | (954) 462-1431 | www.rmzlaw.com

The law firm Rogers, Morris & Ziegler has been in business in South Florida since 1925 when Romney Rogers' grandfather, Dwight L. Rogers Sr., brought his family to Fort Lauderdale.

Romney Rogers is the third generation lawyer in the firm and his son Cam is the fourth. "We feel very connected to Fort Lauderdale having been born and raised here."

As a long-time business, how has your business survived previous economic ups and downs through the years?

We have been fortunate to survive economic downturns, hurricanes and now hopefully survive this pandemic! We have survived by providing our existing clients with great service and developing new clients through relationships and building a good reputation along the way. We have always been a smaller firm that is flexible enough to work with our clients through tough times and provide good counsel and try and be creative to find them workable solutions. Since we have always had a good mix of individual, business and institutional clients and practice in the areas that can survive downturns, we have made it through the other side of 95 years.

How are your work and your company adapting to this new reality?

We have our staff working remotely for their safety, but some lawyers are still coming into the office for "essential services." We are holding up so far without any layoffs or furloughs and hope to maintain that with the help of the SBA loan program.

Is your business open?

We are open and servicing our clients' needs and ready to earn some more business in the area of our practice which includes all types of business advice and transactions, real estate, wills, trust and probate, family law and litigation in all the areas we practice in.

How do you see this crisis impacting your industry for the next six months? 18 months?

We know the economy is in a recession and the question is how long will it stay like this. I am optimistic that in six months we might be back to some sense of normal. However, we don't know how all our clients will fare coming out of all this so we are being conservative with the way we operate. We do know, as we have experienced downturns in last 95 years, this too shall pass!

What are your biggest fears?

Don't like to go to the fear stage, but my concerns in times like these are can we continue to do the right thing to keep our staff employed and our clients problems solved, and still make a living?

What's now keeping you up at night? What used to keep you up at night?

I think we all wake up in the middle of the night over different problems or issues but so far, I am getting enough sleep. I do my best to pray continuously!

What have you learned that might be helpful to others?

Try and plan strategically, but take it one day at time.



15TH STREET FISHERIES

1900 S.E. 15th St. | (954) 763-2777 | www.15streetfisheries.com

Ted Drum's family has been involved in several Fort Lauderdale businesses since 1948.

"My father-in-law started Lauderdale Marina in 1948. My father started business in 1952, and I've been indirectly with these companies since I got out of the service in 1968, 42 years," he said.

The company owns Lauderdale Marina, Drum Realty, and the most well known, 15th Street Fisheries. The popular waterfront eatery is now closed because of the county shelter-in-place order, issued on March 26.

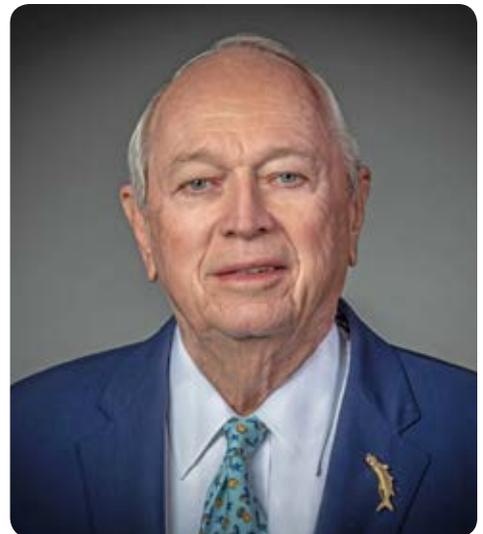
"Lauderdale Marina is operating.

"The 15th Street Fisheries is not. We'll be ready to go as soon as they lift up the restrictions. So we're just having a little challenging time with the restaurant. But other than that, we're doing really good."

15th Street Fisheries does not offer takeout during this time, Drum said, mainly because the location is not ideal for that kind of service.

"Deliveries are very expensive. We never did that. And we did have takeout for pickup for a while, but we decided that fish doesn't travel very well.

"So two of our businesses are open and one is not open."





THE HISTORIC DOWNTOWNER

10 S. New River Drive East | (954) 463-9800
www.thehistoricdowntowner.com

Roger Craft is principal of the Sunchase Group LLC, a holding company that has owned the Historic Downtowner for almost seven years, and Historic Dockers in Dania Beach for more than five years. Restaurants/bars have operated continuously at the Downtowner site since at least 1972, and The Downtowner is in its 26th year of operation.

Here, Craft shares The Historic Downtowner's "everything to everyone" approach, and his thoughts on how business will continue after the pandemic.

After the Great Recession of 2008, "One of our key strategies was to appeal to as many customers as possible by attempting to be everything to everyone. That continues and is accomplished by having a broad menu that offers dishes ranging from burgers and prime rib to seafood.

"Like others in the industry, we have adapted and made drastic changes to our businesses. We are currently open for takeout and delivery only. At this time, we are still offering the full menu, and have the same experienced cooks preparing the food. Even with the current challenges, we will not sacrifice selection and quality.

"We do not anticipate significant changes to our operation after reopening. The Downtowner has particular appeal due to its location, longevity and distinctiveness in an increasingly dense downtown population. We will continue to reach out to visitors and locals alike to expand our base of business.

"Restaurants have always been an essential part of American society, providing the space and opportunity to relax, socialize, have a good meal, and just have fun with family and friends. In the longer term, as the economy and community normalize, I do not expect the fundamental appeal of restaurants and bars to undergo significant change.

"In the nearer term, I expect there will be many challenges within the industry. Some restaurants

currently closed will not reopen, or at least, face serious difficulty to operate profitably. That could happen for several reasons. Financial constraints may inhibit some restaurants and bars from sustaining operations during a prolonged shutdown. Public lifestyles and attitudes will likely have changed due to social distancing, isolation, and other government directives. We may not fully recognize or understand the post-pandemic, 'new' customer behavior, and will have to adapt quickly to balance and accommodate the needs of those customers. And most significantly, it will likely take time for the economy to gain traction and provide people with discretionary income to go out for dinner and enjoy the simpler things of life.

"My biggest concern is that the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic, along with shutdown of the society that we have known, will have a negative impact on the lifestyles and behaviors of typical folks and consumers. Will people still want, or have the funds, to socialize over drinks or dinner? How long will it take for people to adjust from the current environment of uncertainty, isolation and lack of open businesses? Understanding and navigating the 'new normal' will be critical to ongoing success in the industry.

"The singular, most pressing thing that keeps me awake is the welfare of my staff. These folks look to me and the business for employment and wages to sustain their livelihood and obligations. I have retained, and will retain, as many as possible for as long as possible, irrespective of the bottom line. I am encouraged that help will arrive soon with the passage of the CARES Act and its paycheck protection provisions.

"I have come to a greater realization and appreciation that conditions can change in a moment, yet life and business must go on. I would urge people to remain aware, stay up to date on current, reliable information, make sound decisions based on personal and communal needs, and just keep your head up. Whether running a business or conducting personal life, knowledge and discipline are the key factors to a successful, or at least acceptable, outcome to this tough situation."

ROSCIOLI YACHTING CENTER

3201 W. State Road 84 | (954) 581-9200

www.rycshipyard.com

While the full-service Roscioli Yachting Center continues to service boats and yachts, the facility is closed to visitors and all contractors, said Bob Roscioli, owner of the 90-employee shipyard.

"The only people allowed in our yard right now are our normal employees. We're trying to keep our people safe. ... We take everybody's temperature when they come in. The guards have the temperature gauges that they spot everybody that comes, when they go out or come back in. That's a help. Obviously we have cleansing all over the yard where everybody is mandatory, wash our hands and cleaning our cafeteria where we serve food in the morning and the afternoon. So we're really diligent in what we're doing."

Roscioli has been in the business for 58 years.

As a company that's been in business for a long time and I'm sure you've seen economic ups and downs, have you ever seen anything quite like this?

I've been through three recessions. This is my fourth. It's going to be close to a recession unless we get this thing under control. ... You have to be very diligent in your business. You have to work harder and smarter to acquire the business to keep the people coming to you if they will. We lost a lot of work, like all the yards did. But we're diligent on convincing people to get the work done now. Now is the time and don't worry about spending their money.

Have you had to lay anyone off yet?

We laid off a couple of people that we didn't really need in certain areas. We had three or four people in the stockroom. We cut it down. ... But we have some big jobs going.

How is business going right now?

We're a full service yard. We do everything. We do mechanical, electrical, welding, fabrication, carpentry, painting. We do it all, and we have those jobs here right now. Everybody is busy, and we're going to keep them busy. If we're in between a job or a job won't be in until next week, then we'll do our yard work and maintenance.

How do you see this crisis impacting your industry for the next six months, next 18 months?

The boating industry is a remarkable industry, and that's why a lot of people, large companies invest in this kind of a business because it's kind of recession proof. We slow down considerably. But when you've got these multimillion-dollar yachts out there, they still have to be taken care of. They



still have to be worked on. They still have to be stored and taken care of. You can't afford a \$3 million to \$5 million or \$10 million investment to go down the hill. ... It's essential that they have a place to come in an emergency or a haul out. Even though they can't use their boats, they still have to be maintained and taken care of.

So we're kind of resilient. The boating business, I've never seen a shipyard go out of business because of some kind of recession or hard times. If they did go out of business, it was because of maybe poor management. ... This is a tough one because it's a lot of medical issues, which is really a tough one to fight.

Are your workers working more hours or about the same right now?

We're working them a good 40 hours, but weekends we're shutting down.

Before this, were you open weekends?

We used to work half-day Saturdays. ... We were working extra hours because it's the season. Our season starts in September, and we have a little lag over the holiday, and then it starts back up again. Usually people start to get ready to go north. They go north or go to Europe. Well, guess what? They're not going to Europe this year. The boats are going to stay south, which is good for the shipyards. They're certainly not going up to New York or New Jersey. And they started leaving next month or in April, but they're not going. They're staying.

What's now keeping you up at night, or are you a good sleeper?

I'm not a very good sleeper to begin with because my mind is always working, and that's the way I've been all my life. Always thinking, always working. What do we do tomorrow? How can we make things better for everybody?

Have the worries changed?

Worrying doesn't do you any good. You attack problems. I tell them, bring them on. ... Worrying doesn't help you. It's bad for your health, number one. When you get a problem, go attack it. That's what I tell my people. Don't worry. Don't cry. You got to handle it. You got to attack it.



BAHIA MAR

801 Seabreeze Blvd. | (954) 627-6309
bahiamaryachtingcenter.com

The Tate family has been active in South Florida real estate for more than 80 years. “We have never closed our doors or defaulted on a mortgage or business loans,” said James Tate, president and owner of Tate Capital, which owns Bahia Mar marina and resort.

But these times are different, he said, adding “we were forced to temporarily close certain businesses such as the Bahia Resort hotel, by virtue of a local stay home order. However, the Bahia Mar marina is allowed to remain open to the yacht owners with very limited services.”

What changes do you see to your business when the shelter in place is lifted?

The Bahia Mar Resort Hotel will be like every other hotel, slow to rebound. We are expecting a long slow recovery. We are hopeful that the local governments enforce strong local laws to cease all short-term rentals such as, AirBnb who have been allowed to unfairly compete thereby damaging the hotel businesses even prior to this crisis.

How do you see this crisis impacting your industry for the next six months? 18 months?

Six months will be survival mode with huge negative cash flow. My guess is that the business landscape in South Florida will greatly change.

18 months is too hard to predict. We are surviving day-by-day, updating cash flows and projection all the time.

Fortunately, we are well capitalized but unfortunately many of our local business owners are not. It is a very sad and upsetting situation to witness but as we all experience this paradigm shift, we as a people will evolve, adapt and grow.

What are your biggest fears?

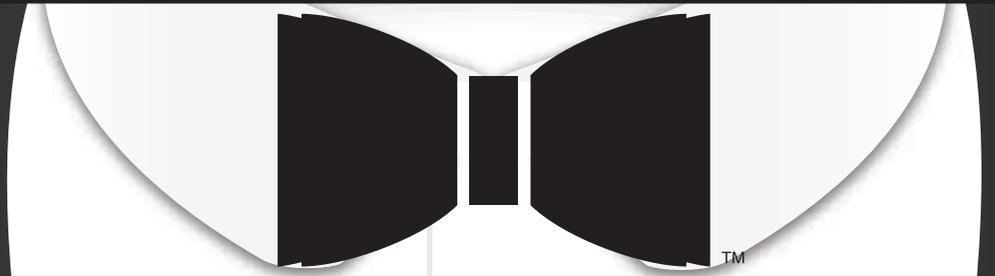
I am most fearful that we could be facing an economic depression with 25 percent unemployment if the current and forthcoming economic stimulus packages are not complete and sufficient to cover, most if not all U.S. industries loses or cash flow concerns.

That being said, I do believe that we have a strong federal government that fully understands the depth of this crisis and they seem prepared to deal with it.

What have you learned that might be helpful to others?

Stay home, heed the advice of the CDC and national and local governments, stop the finger pointing and realize that our short-term goals should be our safety and the safety of our community while trying to balance the economic inefficiencies we are all dealing with.

Once we survive this crisis, we will rebuild. I hope we rebuild as a better people and a more thoughtful and respectful community.



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