

Evers Campaign: Filling in vacant storefronts, Main Street Bounceback program supports small businesses in every Wisconsin county

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MADISON, Wis. — In case you missed it, Governor Tony Evers visited Mercer and Medford yesterday to [announce](#) that the Main Street Bounceback program has now helped more than 3,400 small businesses fill vacant storefronts in all 72 counties.

In Mercer, Gov. Evers [visited](#) Aurora Up North and Gunney SunShine's PX, two small businesses that have filled a previously vacant storefront "famous for its rumors of being a bar once frequented by Al Capone."

In Medford, which has seen sixteen vacant storefronts filled by this program, Gov. Evers [visited](#) Pouring Cats & Dogs, a pet boutique that opened in a previously vacant space. "Without the grant I wouldn't have been able to update my equipment, my computers, get as much inventory as I have in here, to be able to grow as fast as I have," said Natalia Schmitt, the owner of Pouring Cats & Dogs in Medford.

Read more below on how Gov. Evers is helping revitalize Main Streets and support small businesses in every county.

[WXPR: Filling in Vacant Storefronts: Main Street Bounceback program supports small businesses in every Wisconsin county](#)

As you drive north on Highway 51 through the town of Mercer, you may skip over the old building on your left across from the Krist Gas Station.

At first glance, there's not much to the worn brick and faded brown paint façade.

But inside a transformation is underway.

Kim Norkunas and her husband Chip are renting out the space and renovating it to fit their vision.

"You have a vision. You gut everything. You're like, 'I see it.' But other people are looking like, 'Are you sure?'" said Kim.

The space has been pizza place and an antique shop. It's most famous for its rumors of being a bar once frequented by Al Capone.

Now it will be home to Aurora Up North and Gunney SunShine's PX.

[...]

Their business is one of more than 3,400 in the state to receive a \$10,000 Main Street Bounceback grant.

Governor Evers' administration has used \$50 million from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund small businesses through the Main Street Bounceback program. It helps small businesses move into vacant storefronts.

"It's been able to help us almost double our investment. We had some money set aside to invest and making some upgrades. Now we can do twice as much," said Chip.

Aurora Up North in Mercer and The North Pole Bar in Hurley were the two most recent recipients of the Main Street Bounceback grants.

With these two, the grants have now gone to businesses in every Wisconsin county.

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation CEO Missy Hughes and Governor Tony Evers visited the Mercer Thursday to meet the business owners.

Evers says the program is helping local economies recover by supporting small businesses and bringing a boost to already established businesses in downtowns.

"We want to make sure we not only recover but that we actually end up better than

we did before we had that pandemic,” said Evers.

[...]

While both Hughes and Evers say it's great way to help local businesses recover from the pandemic, they recognize many still face challenges.

Chief among them is the worker shortage. Evers says it's not enough to just try and bring people into the state.

“If people can't afford childcare, then they can't afford to go to work in a local store. We have to make sure that our roads and our infrastructure is good, housing is affordable. All those things play a role in making sure we have enough people to work,” said Evers.

Hiring workers is still a ways off in Kim and Chip's plans as they finish up renovations.

With every project accomplished, they get more excited to be part of Mercer's pandemic bounceback story

“We're trying to fill a niche that wasn't fulfilled here,” said Kim.

The pair hope to have the business open in time for busy summer tourism season.

WJFW: [Gov. Evers visits grant recipient in Medford](#)

Following his stop in Merrill yesterday, Governor Tony Evers made a stop in downtown Medford today. The pitstop was to showcase grants given to a pet boutique in town, a part of the main street bounce-back grants program.

Ten-thousand dollars was awarded to the company. Evers spoke to a crowd of roughly thirty people about the grant. The focus was on small business recovery from the last 2 years.

Evers spoke about the community impact the grant could have. “Its takes a lot of work buy a lot of people from the banking industry to the people that work in economic development and Medford pulled together and really, its a miraculous thing. It's a good thing. It shows us what Wisconsin is all about. We have 3500 of these,” said Evers.

That money is intended to help stores move into vacant commercial spaces. Governor Evers shared more about the changes for Medford:

“For a relatively small investments on the state’s part, we get people in to it...sixteen vacant storefronts in the city of Medford have been filled by this program,” said Evers.

The boutique’s owner also shared what this money does for her business:

“Without the grant I wouldn’t have been able to update my equipment, my computers, get as much inventory as I have in here, to be able to grow as fast as I have, said Natalia Schmitt, the owner of Pouring Cats & Dogs in Medford.