Laurie and Corey Bryson, owners of Balsam Falls Brewing Company.

“We were really active in the craft beer community in Florida but knew we would eventually make it to Jackson County, where Corey’s family has been for more than 150 years,” says Laurie Bryson, co-owner of Balsam Falls Brewing Company in Sylva, North Carolina. Laurie and her husband, Corey Bryson, have owned and operated Balsam Falls Brewing since 2017.

“We’ve been trying to build a culture around our brewery,” says Corey. “We’re one of the few craft breweries in the area where our sales are dependent just on our taproom.” While some craft breweries bottle and can their beers for distribution, the only way to get any of Balsam Falls’ beers is to visit the brewery.

The Brysons are one of hundreds of North Carolina small business owners who have recently received an emergency bridge loan through the NC COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Loan program. NC Rapid Recovery is a statewide consortium of partners—including the Golden LEAF Foundation, the NC Rural Center, and seven nonprofit lenders—working across North Carolina to support small-business owners struggling with the economic impact of COVID-19. The program was launched at the onset of the pandemic and is structured to provide loans with a low-interest rate and no payments required in the first six months.

“Filling growlers and curbside pickup helps, but the loan helps us make sure we can get to the other side of this.”

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS
Balsam Falls regularly has 16 beers on tap, and they try to maintain a wide variety of offerings. “We’re different than a lot of craft breweries out there,” says Corey. “Most breweries will have a lot of IPAs or sour beers, and we offer some of those, but we also offer pale ales, milk stouts, and seasonal beers that we make with locally sourced ingredients.”

When COVID-19 started affecting North Carolina, Balsam Falls had to reorganize their operations. The taproom ended up closing but customers could purchase growlers of Balsam Falls beer and take advantage of curbside pickup. “We’re in downtown Sylva so there’s not a lot of street parking,” says Corey. “But we were able to get two parking spots in front of the brewery for pickup.”

The Brysons are using their NC COVID-19 Rapid Recovery loan to provide working capital and to pay expenses that mount up, even as the business is closed. “The pandemic changed everything,” says Laurie. “Filling growlers and curbside pickup helps, but the loan helps us make sure we can get to the other side of this.” Balsam Falls employed 10 people, including Laurie and Corey, prior to the pandemic.

Laurie is an ambassador at the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce and is a board member of the Main Street Sylva Association. She notes that COVID-19 did not just have an impact on her business—it had an impact on the entire town of Sylva. “All of the businesses are trying to band together because we’re all going through it together.”

Laurie and Corey’s loan was administered by Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF), one of the nonprofit NC Rapid Recovery lenders. To learn more about the NC COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Loan program, visit [www.ncrapidrecovery.org](http://www.ncrapidrecovery.org).