“We opened in September of 2012, so we’re going on our eighth year,” says Lisa R. Bugg, owner of The Collegiate Shop Apparel & Gifts in Kernersville. “The store today looks nothing like what we started all of those years ago.”

Bugg is 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 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.

The Collegiate Shop sells apparel and tailgating merchandise for a number of universities and teams. “We have products for the big universities in North Carolina, as well as the universities that border the state and bigger SEC schools,” says Bugg. “There aren’t a lot of shops like mine that aren’t in a college town, so we have people coming in from miles away because we fill a niche.” In addition to Bugg, The Collegiate Shop employs one full-time employee, her assistant manager, and four part-time employees who are high school students.

“During an already stressful and emotional time, the loan is a huge help.”

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**PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**
Two years ago, Bugg acquired a commercial embroidery machine, a heat press machine, and a vinyl cutter, so now The Collegiate Shop can create custom apparel and products for local entities. “If a high school wants to make jerseys or if a parent wants to put their child’s sports number on a shirt, we can do that,” says Bugg. “The custom arm of the store also gets a lot of business from teams outside of the public school system, and that’s what supplements our business when we have slow months.”

Bugg indicates that the months of January, June, and July tend to be slower for her business, but it picks up in August when college sports and tailgating starts again. The potential cancellation of college sports due to COVID-19 presents an issue for The Collegiate Shop’s future revenue streams.

As COVID-19 affected North Carolina, Bugg had to think of different ways to generate revenue for The Collegiate Shop. “Collaboration is everything,” says Bugg. “I brainstormed with my husband and my employees and we created a window shopping program.” Bugg displays merchandise in the large windows on The Collegiate Shop’s storefront, and customers can contact Bugg if they want to purchase any of the merchandise. The products in the window change every few weeks. “We didn’t know how it would turn out,” she says. “But it worked.”

In addition to the window-shopping program, The Collegiate Shop still takes custom embroidery orders and lists products on their eBay site to protect revenue streams while the store is closed.

“During an already stressful and emotional time, the loan is a huge help,” says Bugg. “It’s going to help us get through the other side of this.”

Lisa Bugg’s loan was administered by the Business Expansion Funding Corporation (BEFCOR), one of the nonprofit NC Rapid Recovery lenders. To learn more about the NC COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Loan program, visit www.ncrapidrecovery.org.