AMY LYDA
BLACK MOUNTAIN BISTRO AND CATERING

“We’ve been in business for 15 years,” says Amy Lyda, owner of Black Mountain Bistro and Catering in Black Mountain, North Carolina. “I worked in the restaurant business all throughout college and when I came back home to Black Mountain, I bought the restaurant and got it off the ground.”

Lyda 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—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.

When Lyda started Black Mountain Bistro, she immediately saw the need to add a catering component to her business model. “We’re by a lot of conference centers, and people have weddings up here all the time,” says Lyda. “Catering can be a huge expense, so we try to be as affordable as we can to better meet the need and serve a wider range of customers.”

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PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS
Black Mountain, and most of that area of Western North Carolina, heavily relies on tourism. As COVID-19 started impacting the state, Lyda and other business owners in the area immediately took a hit.

Lyda mentions that she kept the restaurant open for two weeks at the start of the pandemic, but the financial strain was hard and she temporarily closed the restaurant. Most of Lyda’s employees were able to receive unemployment benefits during the time the restaurant was closed.

Lyda has since opened up Black Mountain Bistro with a reduced menu and curbside pickup, and brought on some of the staff that were unable to receive unemployment help. “There are no tourists, but the community has been supportive,” says Lyda. “And we’re so appreciative of the community support, but there are a lot of local restaurants and people can only afford to eat out so much. It’s a tough time—but the support still means a lot.”

Lyda says that when the pandemic started, her biggest concern was her employees. “I want to retain as many of them as I can, but there’s so much uncertainty about what business will look like later on in the year,” she says. “That’s why I applied for the loan—to help get us through until whenever things go back to some sense of normalcy.”

As challenging as weathering the pandemic has been, and will continue to be, Lyda says that what’s getting her through it is her faith and watching the community come together to support each other.

Lyda’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.