

Downtown Huntley comes alive as businesses reopen for the first day of Phase 3 in Illinois

Reopening was made possible by innovative partnerships between local businesses, manager of Sew Hop'd brewery says

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Downtown Huntley was filled with shoppers and diners alike on Friday as the state entered into the third phase of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker's Restore Illinois plan and many businesses were allowed to reopen for the first time since March.

Some locals couldn't wait to get back out into the world for a haircut, a meal with friends or a nice cold beer while others report feeling anxious about the loosening of restrictions. For Huntley resident Ryan Kent, it was no question.

"I've been waiting for this," Kent said. "I just missed going out with my friends and hanging out with them so it's cool to be able to do that ... It's good to just feel a little bit normal again I guess."

As an employee of Walmart, Kent was up to date on the reopening news from the governor's office and said he could not wait to leave his house for some much-needed socialization at one of his favorite spots: [Parkside Pub in downtown Huntley](#).

"It's felt like forever even though it's only been a few months," Kent said. "I understand it...I just don't want to be locked inside forever."

In a [recent reader survey](#) conducted by Shaw Media Illinois, 51% of respondents said they would not visit restaurants and bars now that they are open and 19% said they weren't ready to go out to eat yet, but might reconsider in the future.

Linda from Huntley said she will not be going out to eat anytime soon. She plans to go out to get her hair cut, but feels "nervous" about it.

Barbara and James Donnelly, residents of the Huntley Springs retirement community, came out on May 29 to enjoy some ice cream in downtown Huntley's Town Square. As a couple in their 80s, James Donnelly said the two have been "very fortunate" not to have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic thus far, but remain cautious when they go out.

For the past two months, many of Huntley's pubs, breweries and restaurants have sustained themselves on revenue from delivery and curbside pick-up orders with varying success.

For [Sew Hop'd](#) in Huntley's Union Special Plaza, Manager Katie Hofmann said their ability to weather the storm of COVID-19 shutdowns was aided by innovative ideas and local partnerships.

Before COVID-19, the brewery regularly partnered with local food trucks, resulting in a mutual boosting of sales. When the pandemic hit, Hofmann said they made a point to continue supporting one another.

"We've had them come and do preorder pick-up services here so people can order beer and then they can also order food and we'll bring it all out to the car," she said. "[Fork N Fry](#) is a local, mobile poutinery, they're super great, so they did these really creative to-go kits where you could go home and cook some of their dishes."

Taking to social media, Hofmann said Sew Hop'd was able to maintain some of its revenue through the sale of "snack packs" where she paired local snacks from businesses like [Morkes Chocolates](#) with the brewery's most popular beers.

Similar to the past two months, the transition into reopening on May 29 also went more smoothly for some than others.

With [Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity guidelines](#) restricting restaurants and bars to outdoor seating, having access to a patio has been an important factor in determining which businesses are successful in this phase of the state's COVID-19 recovery.

The staff of [Pub 47](#) built outdoor tables and a patio fence by hand, working through the rain this past week to finish in time for the May 29 reopening, Manager Jordan Threlloff said.

The first row of parking spaces in front of the building will now serve as a makeshift outdoor space for guests. The transition into reopening has been a new challenge for the Pub 47 team, Threlhoff said.

In downtown Huntley's Town Square, the staff of Parkside Pub and [BBQ King](#) are used to serving customers outside. With outdoor spaces and patio furniture at the ready, General Manager of BBQ King's Huntley location, Collin Beck, said it felt like they were just reopening their patio for summer like any other year.

"All we had to do was just some finishing touches," Beck said. "We didn't have to build anything or use up space in the parking lot...so we didn't really have to influx any money on that."

IDCEO guidelines have made it a bit different though, he said. All of the restaurant's servers are required to wear masks, guests are provided with hand sanitizer before they are seated and some of the patio's tables have been removed to ensure they are six feet apart.

The state's safety guidelines also restrict the size of groups to a maximum of six people.

Parkside Pub had a similarly smooth transition, but decided to rent a restroom on wheels as an added COVID-19 precaution so that guests wouldn't have to enter the building, Michelle McConnell, a server/bartender for the restaurant said.

Retail shops, personal care services and many offices were also able to reopen with the beginning of Phase 3. This includes the [American Legion's Huntley chapter](#).

Longtime members Joel Garchie and Scott Fisher came out to sit on the Huntley Legion's patio on Friday to enjoy the sunshine and a cigar. The American Legion provides support to U.S. Veterans and the two have been eager to reconnect with other members, Fisher said.

"We would come here almost daily to meet and talk," he said. "We would come and have a sandwich and talk and catch up and see what everyone needs...we look out for one another so it's nice to be back."

The Huntley Legion opened their bar for outdoor seating at 3 p.m. on Friday. Local veterans can now return to their favorite hangout spot with some modifications for safety.

[Beardsley's Barbershop](#) in Huntley reopened for haircuts at 8 a.m. on Friday and had a steady stream of clients all day, Manager Alex Martinez said as he trimmed a sizeable mop from the head of Huntley resident and self-proclaimed "cool guy," Danny Beck.

"This is the longest my hair has ever been in my entire life," Danny said.

"And now, we're going to have you looking great," Martinez answered.

Beardsley's is now taking appointments online and over the phone. Walk-ins are also allowed, but clients are instructed to wait in their cars to reduce the amount of people in the space at once.

Across the board, Huntley business owners said that they could not have made it through the past two months of closures without the support of their community.

"The Huntley community has just embraced us so we're really glad to be back serving them again," Beck said. "And the Village of Huntley has just been tremendous as well."

The Village of Huntley placed picnic tables in the grass of the Town Square and in parking lots around the downtown area as overflow seating for local businesses. As restaurants hit their reduced capacity limits, customers can order to go while still being able to eat outside.

"I think, as a community, we have tried to make a tough situation into the best that we can for us and for our customers," he said. "We are extremely excited for our customers to come back...we just want everyone to be safe and have fun."