

Community Raises Relief Funds for Aurora Businesses Affected by Civil-Unrest

AURORA, IL – SEPTEMBER 10, 2020 – [The Restore Aurora Business Relief Program](#), established by Invest Aurora, the Aurora Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Quad County African American Chamber of Commerce in June of 2020, has completed the first round of relief grants to local businesses.

The Restore Aurora Business Relief Program was created in response to the eagerness of the Aurora community to support local business owners who were adversely affected during the civil unrest of May 31 and June 1, 2020. Recognizing that our local business community was already under significant financial strain due to COVID-19, Invest Aurora and the Aurora area chambers of commerce jointly developed the program as a means to provide much needed funding for affected businesses, to off-set repair costs not covered by insurance.

In a time of much unrest, the Aurora community has exemplified the “Aurora Strong” mindset. Residents and business owner’s alike banded together to help restore Aurora with an outpouring of donations to the program. To date, the Restore Aurora Business Relief Program has raised over \$60,000 in funds thanks to the generous donations of over 30 Aurora-based organizations and residents. These generous donations combined to award over 16 businesses with a Restore Aurora business relief grant.

"A big thanks goes out to the businesses and residents that contributed to the fund, we couldn't have done this without you," said Bryan Gay, President and CEO of [Invest Aurora](#). "I'm so proud to be a part of a community where so many came together to support these businesses in their time of need."

Newly opened Crystal House, a glass engraving business, was one of the many business that experienced damage to their location in Downtown Aurora on May 31. Before applying to Restore Aurora, owners Elias Akwo and Chaz Nieponski were left wondering how they would be able to afford the costly repairs. The burden was lifted when they were notified that they'd be receiving a business relief grant.

“It created a sound bridge over a potentially scary financial abyss” said Nieponski, adding that “the Restore Aurora [Business Relief] Grant Program literally made it possible for Crystal House to remain current with business obligations such as rent, utilities and supplies.” They believe that without the support of the Aurora community, they would not have had the wherewithal to sustain their business. “The city of light came to our rescue and shined on the pathway out of a tunnel.”

Invest Aurora and the Aurora area chambers of commerce continue to reach out within the business community to ensure that business owners are informed of the local, State and Federal disaster resources available.

“As businesses face the combined health, economic, and civil unrest crises; we want businesses to know that we are here for them.” said Jessica Linder Gallo, President and CEO of the [Aurora Regional Chamber of Commerce](#). “The Restore Aurora Business Relief Program is one example of the business support our organizations have worked to provide. Local businesses are the heartbeat to the economy and we will continue to stand by them as we all strive for economic recovery in our region.”

“Right now, we need small businesses in our neighborhoods to thrive more than ever [and] Latinos are opening more small businesses than anyone else in the U.S.” said Karina Garcia, President and CEO of the [Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#), pointing out that the number of Latino business owners grew 34% over the past 10 years, compared to the 1% total growth of all business owners in the U.S. As the only Hispanic chamber of commerce in the [Western Chicago Suburbs], Garcia recognizes the importance of the Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce actively working during these uncertain times, to ensure that “Hispanic business owners are informed of and up to date with; changes, resources, new policies, concerns, and making sure that they can participate in and understand programs like the Restore Aurora Business Relief Grant Program.”

Providing access to essential business resources and financial relief during these uncertain times means businesses can refocus their energies into their day to day operations and to providing support for staff that may have also been affected. The abundance of support and financial donations provided to affected business and those impacted by the unexpected outcomes of COVID-19 truly highlights the unity within the Aurora community and continues to uphold the belief that we are, in fact, One Aurora.

“Collaboration has always been a cornerstone for business success in Aurora,” said Sherman L. Jenkins, Board Chairman of the [Quad County African American Chamber of Commerce](#). “The unforeseen civil unrest buckled our knees but we didn’t go down. This program shows that we all benefit when we all work together.”

Please visit our website to view a list of all relief grant recipients and the gracious donors who have made this program a success.

Businesses in Aurora and North Aurora still grappling with the effects of the damage remain eligible to apply for financial assistance through the Restore Aurora Business Relief program. Program eligibility and applications are available on Invest Aurora’s ‘Restore Aurora’ webpage at www.investaurora.org/restore.

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