

# Delaware Businesses Respond to and Innovate Through Unprecedented Change

BY PEGGY H. EDDENS

THESE TRULY HAVE BEEN UNPRECEDENTED TIMES. COVID-19 will continue to impact businesses and communities in ways we have not experienced in generations. Now that businesses have developed their reopening plans, it's a good time for all of us to evaluate these changes while still providing employees (at WSFS, we call ours Associates) and customers with the services they seek.

Your top priorities, of course, should be the health and safety of your employees and the needs of your customers while optimizing the operation of your business.

Here's a glimpse of what we can expect as the next phases of reopening unfold.

## Trust will be even more important

Trust has and always will be a key component of your business' relationships with employees and customers. It's important that employers reach out and talk to their employees and solicit feedback regarding their concerns and expectations. Post-COVID-19, health and safety measures will be intensified, which takes trust to a new level. All your constituents need to know you have their best interests at heart.

For employees, sustaining a comfortable work environment may include working remotely, if feasible, or having onsite social distancing protocols in place to provide appropriate safety for co-workers and customers. During Phase I, Delaware allowed businesses to reopen with physical distancing measures, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) guidelines and restricted common areas.

Additional measures that businesses may consider for the comfort and safety of employees and customers, while also preparing for future phases, include designating specific doorways for entering and exiting, and expanding common spaces inside or outside if possible.

Customers have similar social distancing needs and businesses have innovated to accommodate that with online ordering, delivery, curbside pickup and drive-thru only service during the lockdown and Phase I reopening. Many people have made this way of shopping, dining and banking their new normal, and grocery stores, restaurants, retailers and banks have led the way by finding innovative ways to serve customers.

## Operational shifts

Many Delaware businesses changed their operating model during this time, and as those models evolve, trust will continue to be a critical



underlying factor. WSFS introduced drive-thru only banking the week of March 16, setting a precedent in our community. For our retail Associates, we instituted 4 days on, 4 days off scheduling for wellbeing and social distancing purposes.

As a valued business partner, our customers were counting on us to be there for them, as we have been for more than 188 years. Many of our Delaware business customers turned to us to assist when applying for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. Together, we successfully secured loans in Delaware totaling more than \$400 million through May.

Our 1,000 Associates, working remotely since mid-March, seamlessly pivoted to serve our customers and ensure that all their needs were met during a such a time-sensitive and stressful period. More than 200 WSFS Associates, on alternating shifts, worked around-the-clock seven days a week to process a large volume of PPP applications; more than 2,000 applications were approved for Delaware businesses through May. The positive feedback we received was incredible, with many customers commending the dedication of our Associates and appreciating that we were right here for them.

## Looking ahead

As we move to the next phase, WSFS remains committed to our top priority, which is the safety and health of our Associates. We continue to consider options for our retail office locations and corporate offices

that will allow us to serve our customers and be ever mindful of our Associates' wellbeing. Specific considerations include public transportation, configuration of offices and shared spaces, and customer service logistics. As we follow updated guidance, we will consistently monitor Associate comfort levels; we are providing wellness resources, such as financial relief and personal counseling in addition to supplying health and safety products and routine cleaning.

Some larger businesses, such as manufacturing, may look to shift work to adhere to social distancing guidelines while meeting the needs of their customers. Businesses that have been open and operating remotely may consider implementing this "new business as usual" approach, even on a rotating basis, to reduce risk for employees.

All businesses and nonprofit organizations in Delaware are facing similar challenges. There is no "out of the box" or one-size-fits-all approach to reopening your doors and resuming operations.

It's the "Delaware Way" to stick and work together so that we endure through this and thrive on the other side. That spirit is woven through the fabric of our First State and will drive our future success. ■



**Peggy H. Eddens** is executive vice president and the chief associate and customer experience officer at WSFS Bank.

Great advice. Great people.

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