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FEATURED

## State officials stop in Beloit to push WEDC initiative aimed at supporting small businesses

By AUSTIN MONTGOMERY Staff Writer

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Walnut Creek owner Nikkie Chadwick, center, speaks to Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Chief Operating Officer Sam Ridders (at right) with Beloit City Council President Regina Dunkin and Downtown Beloit Association (DBA) Executive Director Shauna El-Amin during a tour of the downtown Beloit apparel store on Wednesday.

Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News



BELOIT — Beloit leaders were joined by Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) staff on Wednesday as part of an effort to support best practice safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while still serving the community.

City Council President Regina Dunkin and Downtown Beloit Association Executive Director Shauna El-Amin partnered with WEDC Chief Operating Officer Sam Ridders to highlight how local businesses are taking steps to protect customers and staff from COVID-19.

The ‘We’re All In’ initiative is a WEDC outreach effort to support the state’s economic recovery. The small group toured downtown Beloit businesses to hear first-hand how owners and employees were getting by.

Ridders said the issue of health safety measures, from masking to social distancing, shouldn’t be politicized.

“This is about supporting businesses and keeping the community safe,” Ridders said. “Beloit businesses join other businesses from all over Wisconsin that get it. They want to get back to work and get back to work in a way that protects health and safety of everyone in our community.”

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Walnut Creek Apparel and Gifts owner Nikkie Chadwick said she was worried about the future of her downtown Beloit business. But thanks to a WEDC small business grant she was able to start on a transition towards making custom face masks for businesses and individuals.

“The WEDC grant went directly towards that transition,” Chadwick said. “We were able to keep our staff busy and working full-time throughout all of this.”

Business operations changed overnight from an emphasis on wholesale apparel transactions towards retail sales, Chadwick said.

“We knew we had to adapt to survive,” Chadwick added. “We knew that we weren’t alone in this. Everyone is having to deal with the impact of the virus.”

Chadwick said other business owners she’s talked to in Beloit generally support the measures in place to protect the public from COVID-19.

“If it’s an option between not following the guidelines and being shut down, every business I know will want to stay open with the requirements in place,” Chadwick said. “I wanted to create a space that was neutral and safe for people when they come into the store.”

Events to promote the initiative took place in Beloit, La Crosse, Stevens Point, Tomah and Milwaukee on Wednesday and events are planned for Fond du Lac, Rhineland, Green Bay and Ashland on Thursday.

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