

# Leading the way in La Marque: The city's EDC helps small business

BY BRANDI SMITH

The past couple of months haven't exactly been business as usual for Texas businesses as they dealt with the initial news of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent closure of anything billed non-essential and now the reopening process. It's been challenge after challenge: how to respond, what to do when shut down, how to operate in this new normal.

"No doubt, this pandemic has not been a friend to many businesses and the effects will remain long after this first wave of infection is gone," said EDC Executive Director Alex Getty. "However, the eternal optimist in me, while sometimes hard to see, looks for silver linings."

Lucky for those in La Marque, the city's Economic Development Corporation is an example of that, stepping up and working at lightning speed to help its business owners stay afloat.

It was only back on March 18 that the City of La Marque ordered the closure of



Alex Getty



bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. Then came Governor Abbott's executive order on March 19, followed by a stay-at-home order from Galveston County Judge Mark Henry.

"We acted quickly to infuse desperately needed cash into small businesses that have been negatively affected by policies put in place to flatten the curve," Getty said. "Those efforts will save some businesses."

Knowing the threat posed to the livelihoods of so many in La Marque, the EDC got to work on a plan. Just two weeks after that March 18 order, it had a plan: the Emergency Business Retention Program, which would provide grants to qualified La Marque business owners impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EDC's board of directors approved it on April 2 during a special meeting and by April 8, the Grant Application Review Committee met to decide who would receive the grants. Staff then contacted business owners and mobilized the City of La Marque's Finance Department and started getting those much-needed grant funds into the hands of those business owners. The last of the checks were issued on April 15, less than a month after the first businesses were forced to close. Now the LMEDC Board of Directors is considering round two of the COVID Emergency Grants.

"Living on the Texas Gulf Coast, we are no strangers to dealing with adversity. Over the years, we have banded together to help each other many times," said Getty.

He added that the EDC was inspired by the innovation it's seen as Texans responded to the pandemic.

"What I have seen and read about regarding innovation over the past couple of months has been incredible. Businesses have pivoted production to meet current needs," Getty explained. "I learned of a company turning their bar into a successful street-front grocery store selling, among other items, fresh fruits and vegetables. Most of us have heard about some of the local distillers pivoting to make much-needed hand sanitizer. Even a mattress company got in on the action by manufacturing masks. Some car dealers are now offering pick-up and delivery at home or work to service or repair cars."

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W Houston, Bellaire Blvd., east of FM 1464	2.98 acres	\$1,050,000
W Houston, FM1464, Richmond, TX	1.89 acres	\$ 825,000
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The EDC's no stranger to innovation itself. The Emergency Business Retention Program is its most recent example, but there are many others before that, including Shine On La Marque.

"We created Shine On La Marque to highlight local businesses and support the Shop Local initiative," said Getty.

In just more than a year, the program has featured more than 30 local businesses. The EDC pays a film crew to visit each location and produce a two-minute spot about it, which is shared via social media. On April 30, for example, Shine On La Marque put the spotlight on The UPS Store. The one rule for Shine On La Marque is that the businesses must be within city limits. Others featured include Hart Pharmacy, Kelley's Country Cookin' and a recent addition to La Marque's Renaissance District: Art of Coffee.

"We make the best coffees, pastries, you name it," said owner Jimmy Sims in the video.

Residents clearly agree, filling the coffee shop's parking lot along Laurel Street every day. It's the kind of mom-and-pop business the EDC is looking for as it works to revitalize downtown with streetscaping projects, new lighting and

infrastructure improvements. Next to Art of Coffee sits a restaurant space, waiting for a tenant, a great opportunity for someone to become a part of La Marque's thriving downtown.

"Now more than ever, the Shop Local movement has momentum and a sense of purpose. People are genuinely making a concerted effort to support family-owned businesses in their communities," Getty said. "It's no secret that small businesses are the lifeblood of a community."

Downtown, however, is hardly the only place to find development opportunities within La Marque. The last mainland city before crossing the bridge to Galveston Island, La Marque boasts the most I-45 frontage of any city in Galveston County. TxDOT is just getting started on a project to widen the freeway, setting up a perfect scenario for developers who plan ahead. By acquiring property and getting started on a project now, they could time their opening with the completion of the expansion.

"The past few months have reminded us how quickly things can change, but what we know doesn't is the importance of location," said Getty. "Location is certainly one of La Marque's strengths."

For more information about development opportunities in La Marque, contact the La Marque Economic Development Corporation by visiting LMEDC.com or calling 409-938-9258.

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**Land:**  
1.472 Acres (64,112 Square Feet)

**Price:**  
\$20.00/SF

**Traffic Counts:**  
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<b>Detail</b>	<b>3 Mile</b>	<b>5 Mile</b>	<b>7 Mile</b>
Total Population	26,719	34,561	44,616
Average Hshld Income	\$58,614	\$63,411	\$67,371

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