



June 2, 2020 Transcript

*Staci Egan of Smith + Front is interviewed by
PA Wilds Ambassador Ellen Matis of Hello Social Co.*

Ellen: Hi, everyone, and welcome to the next episode of the Wilds Are Working series. My name is Ellen Matis, and I'm the owner of Hello Social Co., and I'm a PA Wilds ambassador. And on behalf of the PA Wilds Center today, I'm interviewing Staci Egan, who is part of the husband and wife duo behind Smith + Front in Philipsburg, PA. Stacey is going to share today how their organization has pivoted in the last couple of months in what is an uncharted time for businesses. So, hey, Staci, thanks for coming on.

Staci: Yeah, thank you for having me!

Ellen: So just to get started. Tell us about Smith + Front. How did you get started and what do you offer to the community?

Staci: We got started because I was looking for a studio space to work out of. And I had been working out of State College and was just having a real problem finding an affordable space that even wanted small businesses in it. And I saw the video that the revitalization group put on about Philipsburg. It's really not that far from my house. So we decided to come out and look at some spaces, Looking for something with character, but still affordable. And this just fit it. And we moved in in October of last year. And with the holidays coming, we just decided to also offer a store front, at least through the holidays and see how that went. And it was good. So we still have the gallery side. And then we also have the studio side.

Ellen: Yeah. The PA Wilds region has a lot to offer for businesses. So is there anything else that drew you to the PA Wilds region other than the affordable rental space?

Staci: Well, I mean, we have Black Moshannon over here, which is awesome. There are some other smaller, locally owned businesses, a bakery, vintage and another consignment shop, that there are things to come here and see. And then even if you just wanted a hike. But I think Black Moshannon is really it. We would love to go

there and kayak. And it's nice because you can't have the electric vehicles. So it makes it great for just a smooth time out there and nothing to do. I don't even know what the word is for it, but it just gets out there.

Ellen: Yeah. Absolutely.

Staci: Out in places where you have the big boats,

Ellen: Right. So obviously here in Centre County we have transitioned into the Green Phase. But for over 70 days, businesses had to work to kind of change their business model as a result of COVID-19. So what are some of the ways that your business kind of reacted to the crisis and pivoted?

Staci: Well, it started off that we just had the studio and the gallery part. And I have a website for my business. My husband has a website for his business. And the thought of making another website was exhausting. But then it became pretty clear that we needed to; with everything going on, people are online. People still needed gifts or they just wanted something special for themselves. So it started off just posting things on social media and getting a few people who wanted some things. And then we just decided it would be much easier to have the website. You can see everything that we have, and we can ship. We went on this new third party platform that is now giving a \$25 credit for new customers. So that's another great incentive to get people to shop because that platform is funding that \$25 credit. So as the small business, we are still getting compensated for the full amount, but it's also a great incentive for customers.

Ellen: Okay! That's really cool. So that platform then is probably one of the resources that you would say kind of helped you through the crisis. Are there any other resources or organizations that you found helpful along the way?

Staci: Not as much organizations as just actual people. I think I went through a couple nights just almost being paralyzed, which I'm sure most people were just not really sure where to go or what to do. And one of my friends said, like, 'it's my friend's birthday. And can you make a gift box for me? Just, here's what I'm looking for around and a few ideas. And I did that, and I posted it. And then I got three other inquiries and it just kept snowballing from there. And I thought, why not? Why not? I mean, we slowed down, but we didn't completely stop. So I'm just trying to remember that, you know, I'm still here. You're still here. And there are things that we can all do to help each other. So it was just support, basic, you know, human support that I think we forget about with all the technology and social media.

Ellen: Yeah, and so I actually was able to buy one of your products during this time. And I really loved that you made it possible to stay safe when I purchased it. So Stacy left the product that I bought outside of the store, and I was able to still pick it up at the store. What kind of was your approach to protect your customers there? And was there anything that you're going to continue doing to protect customers now?

Staci: Well, we have a high risk household, so it is a little more sensitive for me. I'm not as worried about myself, but I'm worried about what I can bring home. And I know there's many other people who feel the same way. So it's great because our whole front is windows. So I tried to schedule times for pickup and be able to keep watch for people. So nothing would hopefully get taken by just people wandering around. We're still doing masks and I have Purell wipes at the counter that I offer everyone. People take it. They appreciate it. Doing extra cleaning and just, I mean, we're not a high traffic area to begin with, which makes it easier that I don't have too many people in the store. But if it got to that point, I would probably severely limit how many people I could have in at one time.

Ellen: Sure. So then in addition to having the opportunity to launch this new aspect of your online presence, do you think that there are any silver linings that have helped you during the situation?

Staci: Actually, I feel like having the whole weeks of downtime and not having a lot to do as far as the business goes, it gave me a lot of perspective on every misdoing and what I actually really dreaded doing and how I can align the business now. So I'm happier. And I think that business will thrive when I'm not doing those things that I just really don't want to be doing. So I'm thankful for that perspective.

Ellen: Yeah, for sure. Is there any moment of humanity or inspiration that you think you'd like to share that have helped you or that might help other business owners during this stressful time?

Staci: I just always remember that it's not a me problem. This is like an everyone problem. So just knowing that we're all in this together and there are little things we can all do to support each other. I've always just tried to support small business first, above big and corporate [businesses], but I think now hopefully everyone will kind of see that and how important it is that we support our small coffee shops and restaurants and markets, the small markets above, like, the big grocery chains. But it's just knowing that it's not something I'm going through alone.

Ellen: Yeah, I agree that's really inspiring and I hope that people do see that as well. Well, thank you, Staci, so much. This was really nice to hear your story. If you are watching this and you'd like more information on how to support small businesses and the PA Wilds make sure to visit WildsCoPA.org. There you're going to find all the interviews that have been held in the series so far. And again, if you'd like to appear on the series as a small business owner, you can be sure to apply on that website as well. So thank you, Staci, so much.

Staci: Thank you for having me.

Ellen: All right. We'll see you later.

Staci: Bye.