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Beverly-area Super Raffle ‘offers hope and assurance the community wants these businesses to keep going’

By Susan DeGrane

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pandemic. That effort has inspired an expanded raffle in Chicago's 19th Ward that ends Friday. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)



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Small businesses in the Beverly, Morgan Park and Mount Greenwood neighborhoods of Chicago will get a much-needed shot in the arm when they split a \$200,000-plus pot collected from the 19th Ward Small Business Super Raffle, which ends Friday.

“For small businesses, 2020 has been a living hell,” said Chicago 19th Ward Ald. Matt O’Shea, who initiated the fundraising effort about a month ago to help small businesses in the ward. “I’ve received so many calls from business owners, saying, ‘I don’t know how much longer I can hold on,’ or they’re dipping into savings, or they’re having to lay people off. It’s been a real struggle. Based on the latest infection numbers, we don’t know when it will get better.”

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O’Shea took inspiration from Brian Giaretta, owner of S&T Provisions, 3804 W. 111th St. Last spring, Giaretta organized a similar raffle to raise relief funds for Mount Greenwood businesses effected by the pandemic.

“I wouldn’t say it has increased foot traffic, because half of these businesses are closed. But it has brought awareness to local businesses and their struggles,” Giaretta said. “It also offers hope and assurance the community wants these businesses to keep going.”

More than 20,000 tickets had been sold by the end of last week, O’Shea said, and several people bought multiple tickets.

Among the 6,000-plus individuals who purchased \$10 raffle tickets, five will collect impressive

prizes. First prize is \$15,000 in cash or a 2020 Ford Escape valued at more than \$26,000; 2nd Prize is \$5,000 and free pizza for one year from S&T Provisions; 3rd, 4th and 5th prizes are \$3,900 in \$100 gift cards from participating businesses.

Two local banks, McCarthy Ford and County Fair, a local grocery, put up significant money and donations for prizes. “It’s not surprising the support this received,” O’Shea said. “We’re a community that pulls together. Anytime someone needs help, people here come together.”



Morgan Martin, owner of Live and Believe Nutritional Center, appreciates support from the Beverly/Morgan Park/Mount Greenwood community that has taken the form of a raffle to help small businesses. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)

The 39 small businesses on the receiving end were required to do their part to help as well. Each donated three \$100 gift cards and were required to sell at least 100 \$10 tickets. They also had to post the contest on their social media outlets. This facilitated easy purchase and counting of tickets sold by each business.

O’Shea also enlisted the Mt. Greenwood Community & Business Association, the 95th Street Business Association and Morgan Park Beverly Hills Business Association to make their members aware of the raffle.

“Our message to business members was, we’re all in this together,” said Caroline Connors, executive director of the Morgan Park Beverly Hills Business Association. “We’ll help you, but you have to help yourself too.”

John Brand, owner of Open Outcry, 10934 S. Western Ave., was more than happy to sell tickets and post the raffle on the brewery and restaurant’s Facebook page. He serves on the board of the Morgan Park Beverly Hills Business Association.

“At this moment, every dollar for a business is critical to pay staff and keep operating,” Brand said. “To survive this year, you have to be innovative and creative, and you have to be willing to adapt and roll with the punches.”

Besides participating in the raffle, he gave work to local carpenters by hiring them to build heated rooftop cabins for his business.

Several restaurants and bars figured into the Super Raffle mix, but other businesses also included a sign company, fitness center, beauty salons, an import store, T-shirt business, CPR training

business, shoe store and coffee shop.

Along with other family members, Morgan Martin operates Live and Believe Nutrition, 2025 W. 95th St. “Our gym is closed and we’re still paying rent,” Martin said. “The money will help tremendously.”



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A member of the 95th Street Business Association, the health, nutrition and fitness lounge at still offers online fitness classes. It’s also closing in on selling the 100-ticket quota, which Martin has appreciated as a pleasant diversion. “It’s allowed us to connect with others the community,” she said.



Debra Gawrys, owner of Connections Learning Center in Mount Greenwood, expects to receive more than \$5,000 from a raffle intended to help businesses in Chicago’s 19th Ward. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)

Like these and so many other businesses, Connections Learning Center, a tutoring and brain training instructional site at 2744 W. 111th Street, has endured a challenging year.

“We had about 70 kids when the pandemic hit,” said owner Debra Gawrys. “When we reopened, we had only about 20. Many parents are doing learning pods at people’s homes. Even now, we’re only up to 35 or 40 students, and they’re all mostly new clients.”

Gawrys obtained paycheck protection loans and other government loans and grants, but these didn’t help as much as she had hoped.

“It kind of adds insult to injury because the loans from the city have to be paid back with interest,” she said. “This raffle is fantastic because it’s a gift. It doesn’t have to be paid back.”

Each of the 39 businesses can expect to receive more than \$5,000, organizers said.

Susan DeGrane is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.

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