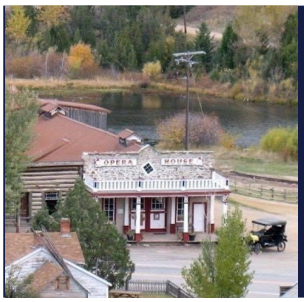
Julia Jaksha
Regional Director
Melissa Wanamaker
Covid Specialist

headwaters
RESOURCE CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

Butte Regional SBDC

Virginia City Players

Virginia City, MT



"Melissa and the Butte SBDC helped our business tremendously starting in November 2020, in the height of the COVID 19 pandemic. Melissa was committed to the whole process and ensured we were receiving up to date information on opportunities our business qualified for. If it hadn't been for the funding we received from the SBA, I don't know that we would have made it through the year. The money we received has allowed us to stay open for this season and continue planning next season s events to attract tourism to Virginia City.

Bill Koch, Owner

Bill and Christina Koch are the owners of the Virginia City Players, which is the oldest continuously operating summer stock theatre company west of the Mississippi River. The summer of 2021 was their 73rd season, proving they have been a regional favorite for many years.

Like so many others who serve the tourism industry, their business was closed due to COVID-19 during the summer of 2020. When mandates closed their business, they explored every option to pay their employees and keep their business afloat. "The Opera House is the hub of Virginia City. When we had to close in July 2020, people lost hotel reservations, restaurant reservations, everything. People come to Virginia City to see the Players. If you don't believe in yourself and your business, you shouldn't be in business. I believe in this place with all my Heart and Soul," said Bill.

They reached out to Julie Jaksha, Regional Director at the Butte, Montana SBDC office. She assisted with a five-hour power coaching session to assist them with marketing materials for crowdfunding. She also assured them that government assistance program information for shuttered venue operators would be available soon. Julie then introduced them to her COVID-19 Business Advisor, Melissa Wannamaker.

Over the next few months, Melissa helped Bill and Christina prepare applications to receive PPP funding and a shuttered venue operators grant. This assistance saved twelve seasonal jobs. It also ensured the future of the long-standing theatre which provides economic impact in the rural towns of Virginia City, Sheridan, Ennis, and Twin Bridges.

Today, Virginia City Players is looking forward to next season with additional improvements! The summer 2022 season will open on Memorial Day with silent movies. Bill is excited about the renovations to his 1915 Cremona Photoplayer - one of only two left in the world! The instrument is sixteen feet wide and features two side chests containing a xylophone, flute, bass pipes, bass drum, cymbals, and more; the source of soundtracks for silent movies at that time.

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