

Checking In | Voices from the New England Economy

Yankee's weekly roundup of personal stories about running a business in these uncertain times.

Ian Aldrich • May 30, 2020 • [Read Comments \(7\)](#)

As everyone in New England — and the world beyond — is being forced to rethink how they live and play and work and learn in the face of a pandemic, business owners are among those facing the most extreme challenges. They are tasked with keeping not only themselves and their families healthy, but also their employees, their customers, and the business itself.

We are here to share their stories. Each week, deputy editor Ian Aldrich checks in with some of the New England artisans and entrepreneurs that *Yankee* has introduced to its readers over the years, and learns how they are tackling the toughest job of all.

Readying a Lion to Roar Again

Sarah Eustis, CEO

Main Street Hospitality | Stockbridge, MA

Next Saturday, Sarah Eustis will feel like she can breathe again.

That's when, if all goes according to plan, the first guests will begin to file into the **Red Lion Inn**, the historic 18th-century inn that Eustis and her team had to close nearly three months ago due to the coronavirus pandemic. Main Street Hospitality oversees and runs eight hotels in southern New England, but it's the Stockbridge property that is especially meaningful to Eustis, since her family has owned the 125-room luxury inn for more than half a century.



Sarah Eustis, CEO of the Massachusetts-based group Main Street Hospitality.
Courtesy of Main Street Hospitality

much — not just to all of us who work here, but for those who come here as well. There are going to be some tears to have it open again.”

But welcoming guests back has required considerable strategic planning. Over the past three months, Eustis and her team have had to walk a fine line between protecting the “Red Lion experience” and making sure guests and staff feel safe amid a health crisis that still grips the country.

“There’s an emotional part of going away,” she says. “That feeling like you truly are away. That’s the thing we have to make sure isn’t compromised. But we also have to recognize the world we live in.”

At the Red Lion, that’s meant a careful realignment of key guest experiences. New menus have been designed to make for easier food delivery, while lodging packages have been specifically crafted to cater to visitors traveling from Boston and New York. To allow for social distancing, dining and porch spaces will have less seating.

“We have to make sure our guests feel that emotional assurance,” says Eustis. “Eye contact, body language, and the voice and tone we use when we are interacting with guests — those have always been important, but they’re especially vital now.”



The Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, MA.
Courtesy of Main Street Hospitality

If anything, however, the Red Lion’s closure has demonstrated just how much the inn has meant to the guests who regularly visit. Over the past few months, says Eustis, letters and emails have poured in from longtime visitors to express their gratitude for the property and their hopes to visit again. And when the Red Lion began taking new reservations, many familiar names immediately booked their stays, including one guest who booked 27 consecutive nights for later this summer. That kind of loyalty gives Eustis hope in a time when it can feel like that sort of thing is in short supply.

“I was working in New York City when 9/11 happened, and later when the financial crisis hit in 2008. But this was different,” says Eustis, whose company is slated to open two new hotels later this year, the Beatrice in Providence and Hammetts Wharf in Newport. “Trying to get through this is the hardest thing I’ve ever done. To come through the other side of it, to go all the way to the edge and look over, but not go over, will feel really good.” —*May 29, 2020*

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