

# LOWER WISCONSIN RIVER VALLEY SENTINEL

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## Governor Evers visits Spring Green businesses that received 'We're All In' grants

Taylor Scott, *Managing Editor*

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers visited Spring Green Tuesday to tour two businesses that received "We're All In" grants, in the midst of a proposal that would seek to change how federal moneys, including those that fund grants like these, are allocated and by whom.

On Tuesday, a public hearing was held in Madison for Senate Joint Resolution 84, a resolution introduced by Senate Republicans in the state legislature that would seek to amend the Wisconsin Constitution to grant the legislature more authority to determine how federal moneys may be spent, authority that currently resides solely within the executive branch.

The proposed constitutional amendment would have to pass two consecutive legislative sessions and then be approved by voters in order to become law.

The "We're All In" small business grants were funded primarily by the federal CARES Act, with the largest initiative providing \$2,500 grants to over 26,000 small businesses. The first phase of grants were limited to small businesses with up to 20 full-time employees that were in business by January 2020 and with total annual revenues of up to \$1 million.

According to the Governor's office, Evers, a Democrat, has issued \$240 million total in "We're All In" grants to about 55,000 small businesses across the state through three different phases.

In a statement from his office, Evers said he believes that the process of allocating these federal funds has worked well during the pandemic. He also said he listens to legislators and that "they are by no means kept in the dark about how we are allocating these funds." Evers' office further stated that they believe the governor is in a unique position to make these decisions as an executive officer who represents the entire state.

Senator Howard Marklein (R-Spring

Green) disagrees, releasing a statement Tuesday that touted the introduced constitutional amendment as a proposal that enshrines fiscal responsibility and accountability.

"By opening up billions of dollars in spending to the legislative process, lawmakers and the general public will have significantly more opportunity to have their voices heard and encourage a more accountable and efficient distribution of those funds," said Marklein.

Evers, for his part, highlighted how Wisconsin's economy is "bouncing back" due to his management of these funds, noting Wisconsin's record-low unemployment of 3 percent and \$1.18 billion positive balance in the state's general fund—the largest positive balance in Wisconsin state history.

"I know it's been a tough two years for our small businesses, and we've worked hard to get resources and support to our family businesses, main streets, and communities across Wisconsin. As I've traveled the state, visiting with small business owners and talking with community members, it's been great to see how folks have come together to support one another, displaying incredible resilience and Wisconsin ingenuity to keep up with the curve balls they've been thrown. That's certainly true here in Spring Green," said Evers, during his visit. "Our local small businesses make up the core of our local economies, and we've been proud to support their good work with these funds, which have provided a critical boost when they needed it most to help keep the lights on and doors open."

At his first stop in the Valley, the Spring Green General Store, Evers met with owner Karin Miller, toured the store and discussed issues facing small businesses.

"I talked with him for quite a while," said Miller. "I mentioned how resilient the business community is here in Spring Green — but how important all of the help that we received was. I



Photo by Taylor Scott, *Managing Editor*

Gov. Evers peruses Arcadia Books in Spring Green on Tuesday after speaking with staff about grants.

personally don't believe my business would have made it through the pandemic without the help I received."

Miller said she was able to use the grant to buy inventory to restock the store's shelves. She was able to stay ahead of some of the severe supply chain issues caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by utilizing the grant to order retail and restaurant supplies further in advance, with the grant guaranteeing she had the resources to pay for the supplies. She also used the grant to buy items that were more geared towards her new online store.

When asked about the current wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to set dire records, Miller expressed her concern.

"Truthfully: I'm scared again, not grieving the way I was in 2020, but feeling uncertain. I hope this passes quickly. I had to close the Café this week because so many of my staff were exposed to COVID. So far, nobody has it— but they were exposed, and need to quarantine. That is another first!"

On ways the community can support her small business, Miller was clear: "Come in and shop with us!" She encouraged guests to request curbside pickups and to order from their online store, while inviting customers to come back to eat with them when their Café is open.

"I witnessed how much this community supports their small businesses this holiday season — and I am grateful."

While Evers headed to his next stop in Spring Green, promising to bring his wife Kathy back to visit the store, he couldn't resist purchasing a puzzle, "Winter City" according to Miller, from a company out of Minnesota, called PuzzleTwist.

Evers next stopped by Arcadia Books, speaking with staff and touring the bookstore.

According to Arcadia Books Co-Manager Nancy Baenen, they used their grant to purchase additional outdoor

seating, "so customers could linger while socially distanced," she said. Baenen said they also used the grant to purchase additional PPE items like masks and hand sanitizer, knowing that cold weather and the school year would start shortly and the spread of the virus would increase.

"We were so honored that the Governor chose to visit our store and community and appreciated his genuine interest in the health of all local small businesses," said Baenen. "When Governor Evers asked how we've fared throughout the pandemic, we attributed our success to the incredible support of our very loyal customers and the fact that we had a fully operating webstore prior to 2020, allowing customers from around the country to easily order books."

Baenen also said she discussed with Evers how the canceled 2020 season at American Players Theatre dramatically reduced the number of in-store customers that summer.

"The best way to help River Valley businesses is to continue to shop and dine locally and to do everything possible to end the spread of the virus — masks, vaccinations and boosters," said Baenen. "We were proud to brag about the incredible job that the Spring Green EMS is doing with testing and vaccination clinics."

As Evers perused the bookstore after speaking to its staff, Baenen gave the governor a copy of *The Sentence* by Pulitzer Prize winning author Louise Erdrich.

"All of the Arcadia employees have read this book and absolutely love it. It is set at Birchbark Books in Minneapolis (a real store, owned by Erdrich) during the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd and the unrest that followed," said Baenen. "In addition to the societal issues, it is a love letter to independent bookstores and a ghost story."

"*The Sentence* also happens to be our February Arcadia Book Club selection, so we made sure to invite the governor to join us for our Zoom discussion."



Photo by Taylor Scott, *Managing Editor*

Gov. Evers speaks with Spring Green General Store owner Karin Miller on Tuesday in Spring Green.