

## Rowlett ROBUST Ready Program Highlights Grant Recipients

**Rowlett, Texas – May 17, 2021** – The development of the Rowlett Ready program, a community-focused group formed to help direct disaster related resources to those who need them in the City of Rowlett TX, was already underway prior to COVID. At the onset of the pandemic, city and community leaders quickly established the Rowlett Business Stimulus (ROBUST) grant program to provide short-term, immediate financial aid to small businesses who had sustained economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Rowlett Community Organizations Active in Disaster (RCOAD) Board of Directors and the City Council felt strongly that the Rowlett business community needed their support during this extraordinary health crisis and needed it quickly.

The ROBUST grant program initially received \$100,000 through the City of Rowlett which allowed the program to begin awarding dollars to businesses. This helped to cover the time gap until Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES Act) funds were received. Over \$915,000 in grant funds were provided to 93 individual businesses.

“As part of an overall strategic priority of fostering economic vitality, the City Council adopted a goal to strengthen the City’s employment base,” said Rowlett Mayor Tammy Dana-Bashian. “Recognizing the unprecedented financial impacts to the local economy and to our small businesses, we believed strongly that the Rowlett business community deserved our support during this extraordinary health crisis. The ROBUST Grant could be the difference in them surviving or closing their business.”

The ROBUST grant program focused on assisting non-home-based small businesses located within the City of Rowlett. Some examples of the qualifying criteria included businesses with 100 or fewer FTEs and 2019 annual gross income of less than \$10 million; must be a locally owned, independent business responsible for all revenue and expenses; in existence on or before February 1, 2019 and must have experienced a loss of at least 25% in income since March 1, 2020 due to COVID-19. Grants were based on 3 months of business: payroll, lease payments, utilities, renting of existing equipment, payment of existing business-related loans for equipment, vehicles, and/or real estate, \$3,000 of restart-up capital.

The ROBUST grant program allowed for four rounds of grants beginning with the first round of funding initiated in April 2020 and the fourth round of applications closed at the end of April 2021. The response from the Rowlett business community was tremendous.

- **ROBUST Round 1 Funding:** Initiated in April, \$100,000 in grants awarded to 19 businesses (maximum of \$10,000 per business).
- **ROBUST Round 2 Funding:** A second round funded remaining eligible applicants from the first round, awarding \$291,245 in grants to 21 businesses (maximum of \$10,000 per business).
- **ROBUST Round 3 Funding:** Round 3 awarded \$204,704 to 14 businesses (maximum of \$25,000 per business).

- **ROBUST Round 4** Included two categories of grants. Under the Recovery Assistance Grant, \$230,500 was awarded to 25 businesses. Under the Reimbursable Purchase Grant, 13 businesses applied with a total amount requested of \$88,792. (maximum grant of \$10,000 per business per grant category and \$20,000 maximum for businesses receiving both grants).

Mirtha and Salvador Cardenas own **Barrocos Latin Cuisine**, one of the businesses who received ROBUST grant funds. Their restaurant, located in the Village of Rowlett Downtown, serves authentic Colombian cuisine in addition to their crowd-pleasing Tex-Mex dishes. “We feel so fortunate to receive ROBUST grant funds.” said Mirtha and Salvador Cardenas. “Going through the pandemic has had a significant impact on our business, including closing for a period of time. We were able to increase our curbside pickup and catering business which helped. We are so pleased to be open at full capacity again and see business starting to pick up. Also, moving our business to the Village of Downtown Rowlett a year ago was a great decision, increasing visibility and customer traffic. We especially want to thank the City of Rowlett and Rowlett Chamber of Commerce for their support. The ROBUST grant dollars helped tremendously and allowed us to keep our business running.” Check out Barrocos Latin Cuisine and stop in for some amazing food. <https://bit.ly/2RavFDI>

**Girlfriends Boutique**, a clothing, accessories, gift boutique located in the Village of Rowlett Downtown, is one of the many businesses that also received ROBUST grant funds. “The money came at the most opportune time. I was very low on inventory and no sales were coming in. So, when I got the funding, I was able to restock some inventory which, in turn, brought people in to see the new items and that really kick-started my business after the 7-week closure,” said Cheryl Fitzgerald, Owner, Girlfriends Boutique. <https://bit.ly/3w7sJpU>

Michael Gallops, President of the Rowlett Area Chamber and chair of the Rowlett Community Organizations Active in Disaster board shared his insights from working with these small businesses. “The ROBUST grants have had a truly profound effect on small businesses in Rowlett. Many of them simply would not have survived without these grants so I can honestly say that lives and dreams have been saved. The gratitude from each and every recipient has been incredible. Small business is the heart of Rowlett and the Rowlett Area Chamber is very proud of our City for providing these grants.”

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Rowlett is a top location in the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex for small business. The City of Rowlett placed #44 in the Best Small City to Start a Small Business out of 300 small cities in the U.S. Rowlett showed well across the ranking metrics which included education levels, travel time to work, per capita income, broadband access, loans per business, and tax score. The City of Rowlett and the Village of Downtown Rowlett offer an excellent environment for small business. That combined with our location on the beautiful Lake Ray Hubbard and abundant parks and recreation amenities, makes Rowlett an excellent location to live, work, play! To find out why small business loves Rowlett, contact: Libbey Tucker, Rowlett Economic Development, [LTucker@rowlett.com](mailto:LTucker@rowlett.com)