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# Local businesses impacted by ongoing Caledonia road blockades



by [Kaitlyn Clark](#)

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CALEDONIA—As demonstrations in Caledonia surrounding the McKenzie Meadows development site stretch on with seemingly no end in sight, local businesses are being caught in the middle.

Tanya Ribbink and her husband Steve started Rustic & Reclaimed eight years ago, quitting their day jobs five years ago to put their full attention on the growing business. This year the Ribbink family expanded their operations by opening a second business, Rustic Retreat, an Airbnb located at the same site on Highway 6 just outside Caledonia.

“We installed eight-foot letters with our business name and logo on the roof of the barn. It’s essentially a massive billboard. We had that installed in May and it was fantastic for business because you can see it from the highway. People would just drive in,” said Ribbink.

“I wasn’t really paying attention when the occupation started as to how it was affecting business. It couldn’t have been too significant,” added Ribbink.

She noted that the effect was very noticeable once the road was blocked: “The first time the blockade went up we went from having 60 cars on a Saturday to two. That definitely hurt.”

“We’re completely blocked off. You have to go through the OPP to get to us. Because we’re in between Fourth Line and Fifth Line, traffic is being routed through York. Nobody is seeing our sign because nobody is on Highway 6 now,” explained Ribbink.

She added that she does not have an exact figure on her losses, but knows they are significant.

“All I know is that Saturdays are usually our money-making days and they have significantly dropped off. Customers have significantly dropped off,” she said. “We still have projects that keep us going that have been ordered over the last few months. Maybe I’m just afraid to look at the numbers.”

Ribbink said people are able to pass the police block to visit Rustic & Reclaimed, which remains open, by telling the officers their destination: “If people don’t approach them they just assume they can’t get to us because they see the road blocked,” said Ribbink. “One officer suggested putting a sign down by where they were. We put a sandwich board in his cruiser and he took it down to Fourth Line.”

Just down the road, Al Wright is facing similar problems running the normally popular dog sports facility K9 Fun Zone.

The facility was a long-time dream for Wright and his wife, and now hosts amenities such as a heated saltwater pool for swimming, doggy day care, ball pit, and an off-leash area.

Wright chose their current location specifically because it is normally a high-traffic area close to town and would make their business a convenient spot for local dog owners.

“Now it’s a dead-end street with no traffic whatsoever,” said Wright, noting that they rely on word of mouth “and people seeing us” for advertising. “For our off-leash area, people can’t just drive five minutes up from Caledonia, they have to drive 15 minutes around to get here and another 15 minutes to get back. It’s inconvenient.”

The blockades have caused a number of logistical issues for the business. With the business no longer being conveniently located, they have gone from six dogs a day in their daycare to two. Wright is concerned that those who find new daycare options for their pet may not return even after the blockades are down. COVID

restrictions also mean they need to keep clients separated, so missing an appointment time because of the longer drive means customers, even ones coming from far away, are out of luck: “We charge \$25 for half an hour and \$40 for an hour for the pool rentals and we’re booked typically from eight in the morning to nine at night, 13 hours a day. That’s \$500-600 a day.”

K9 Funzone also hosts a house league for dogs on Wednesday night with 60 people registered, bringing in about \$1,000 a night. When the blockade first went up, they were forced to shut down their operations for two full days, which ended up costing Wright over \$3,000 in lost revenue.

Actions taken by demonstrators, such as burning tires near his home, has left the Wrights feeling nervous about their safety as well, leading them to take measures they previously would not have considered.

“We’re going for courses to get a restricted gun licence,” said Wright. “Not that we would ever use them, but for security.”

In closing, Ribbink spoke to her hopes that this situation will come to an amicable end sooner rather than later: “I wish a peaceful resolution could be found, something that could appease all parties. It’s frustrating to have the two communities that are basically next-door neighbours have a divide like this. It’s unfortunate.”



### **Kaitlyn Clark**

Born and raised in Cayuga, Kaitlyn Clark started freelancing for The Haldimand Press straight out of university. A few months later she took on the role of a full-time reporter and just two years later she and fellow reporter Jillian Taylor took over as co-publishers. She is honoured to help The Haldimand Press continue its great legacy of community-minded journalism.