

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

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BUSINESS

Black-owned businesses in Hamilton saw bump after Blackout Tuesday, but support is waning

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When people around the world posted black squares on their social media accounts on Blackout Tuesday, Hamilton's Montague sisters went a step further to help support the Black community.

"A lot of our friends were posting the image and not doing more in terms of activism," said Alexandria Montague, 21, of the social media event that happened June 2. "We really felt a great form of activism is purchasing power. A way to really support the Black community is to buy their services and products."

Alexandria and her sisters, Ashleigh, 28, and Aby, 17, who live on Hamilton Mountain, put together a list of local Black-owned businesses. Within three days, more than 3,000 people were following their Instagram account, [@blkownedhamont](#). Since then, their followers have grown to more than 4,500. The list includes more than 140 businesses and has been shared widely.

"The response was overwhelming. The community came together to support business owners and celebrate and explore Black-owned businesses," said Aby.

[Although that initial enthusiasm has waned somewhat. Black-owned businesses in Hamilton say they're still seeing increased support and attention four months later.](#) But at least one community leader is calling for more of a sustained effort to help address issues of systemic racism.

Ashleigh says their campaign and participation from the Hamilton community helped draw attention to Black-owned businesses, musicians, artists and entrepreneurs. "It was a chance to recognize these people doing the work for who they are and to celebrate their achievements and know their struggles," she said.

And the sisters say the social media support went beyond sharing and posting the list.

"We have people messaging us saying, 'I need a baker, can you direct me to a Black-owned business' or 'I need a graphic designer, can you please direct me,'" says Alexandria. "Businesses tell us they've had new customers, seen traction on their social media, with people recommending them to friends and followers or posting their visits on social media. They have also had allies offer their services to help grow their businesses."

Mouhamadou Taffa, who owns The Juice Kitchen on Concession Street, was amazed by the support.

“One morning I woke up and we had gained almost 1,000 new followers. I couldn’t believe it. I just kept watching the number go up,” he says. “We had people come check us out, different age groups, [white](#), Black, everyone came. Especially during COVID-19, this was a big down time, and it gave us a huge boost. It has slowed down, but I still notice people looking us up. I hope other small businesses are getting the support and that it continues.”

Hairstylist Lohifa Pogoson-Acker, owner of LoDidThat, a hair salon on the west Mountain, said she also saw an increase in social media followers, including white followers.

“There were people wanting to be more aware about issues around racism and Black Lives Matter. In terms of translating into dollars, I haven’t seen that. But it gave me a chance to expand my audience and a chance to be heard, which is just as important as business dollars. I am happy to have an extra follower who can be exposed to my voice and my experiences. That means just as much to me,” she said.

“If we all stay in our bubbles of racial comfort, there is no way we are going to learn.”

Kojo Dampety, interim executive director of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, says he was happy with the increased support for Black-owned businesses, adding that HCCI also experienced an increase in financial donations this spring.

“Now that things are entering into another phase, the support is dying down. For organizations like us, we need a continued effort. We are trying to address systemic racism and hate, which Black-owned businesses experience,” Dampety said.

“Financial support is needed, but also talking about the issues we face. We need systemic changes.”

Special to The Spectator

Here are some ways to support Black-owned businesses:

- Check out and use the list of local Black-owned businesses, or add to the list, at linktr.ee/blkownedhamont and follow [@blkownedhamont](https://twitter.com/blkownedhamont)

“Keep the list in your mind. When it was my birthday, a friend who doesn’t live in Hamilton used the list to choose a business to find a gift to send me,” said Ashleigh Montague of BLK OWNED HAMONT.

- Recommend businesses or products to friends and family members and share on your social media accounts
- Donate time and money to organizations like the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, the SPACE Youth Centre and the Afro Canadian Caribbean Association
- Offer mentorship or services to Black entrepreneurs in your field
- Research the diversity record and policies of larger corporations you purchase from or visit
- BLK OWNED HAMONT has created a survey in order to understand the consumer’s perspective and experience of using a Black-owned business in Hamilton. To participate, visit forms.gle/Tt2P.JpHRqSuwobUh8

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