

NEWS RELEASE

ATTN: UCBJ

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FROM: Franklin Fixtures, LLC, Cookeville, TN

Local millwork and fixture manufacturer Franklin Fixtures is working to help retailers, libraries, museums and restaurants reopen and fully use their spaces safely. According to co-owner Lisa Uhrik, "Like all small businesses, we've needed to find ways to both pivot our business and support our customers nationally. We've introduced online education workshops for small retailers to help them think through resources and strategies, along with a line of products we hope will help."

Introducing a line that includes custom sneeze guards and movable acrylic wall partitions, Franklin hopes to help bookstore and small retail clients as well as restaurants and universities find ways to reopen in an era of pandemic uncertainty. "Operating at 50% capacity will be unsustainable to coffee shops, restaurants and such," says Lisa. "And in order for our small bookstore and other retail clients to prosper, they'll need ways to make it clear that they're thinking about the safety of their shoppers."

Uhrik has reached out to state officials in hopes of finding that the acrylic wall systems (which retail at about \$500 per panel) could be protection sufficient to allow people to dine or enjoy their coffee in closer proximity.

Uhrik has also provided small retailers with an online education series at the request of BookExpo/Unbound: "Supercharging: Safe Reopening Strategies" is free on Facebook along with 4 other live 30 minute workshops that extend into June.

[\(https://www.facebook.com/bookexpo/videos/1126202471047861/\)](https://www.facebook.com/bookexpo/videos/1126202471047861/).

"It's really amazed us how popular these workshops have been," says Lisa, noting that instead of the dozens expected, there are now thousands who have viewed. "The response has been overwhelming nationally and I'm hopeful that some of our friends in the UC can benefit as well. Though the message is for bookstores, the information works equally for other retailers." Uhrik said.

Moved to Cookeville in 2015 as part of an economic development initiative, Lisa and husband Dave Uhrik have worked to make their solar-powered manufacturing plant an example of manufacturing efficiency in a familial work environment. If you saw the movie "You've Got Mail," you saw their shelving in the bookstores there and if you've been in a bookstore or library recently anywhere in this country, there's about a 70% chance that the displays came from Franklin Fixtures. Dave spotted this literacy-devoted manufacturer in Cape Cod and thought it a great fit for growing good jobs in the Highlands. Investing themselves and their savings, Lisa and Dave brought the company to the area and have been working on building the business since.

"We were having a banner year," says Dave, "but between the tornado and COVID related delays and stops, about 85% of or normal projects have left the schedule." For the sake of safety, the Uhriks opted

to move to a smaller core crew through April and added volunteers back in early May. Those uncomfortable with the return or unable due to child care remain on furlough – about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the workforce. “We’ll emerge stronger than before, but every week is a process. In the absence of traction with the SBA Disaster nationally, we’re grateful for the local support of Tyler Asher in helping to shepherd our situation to keep us strong.” Uhrik said.

Franklin Fixtures employs 35 persons and is located in Cookeville on Maxwell Street. Items for safe re-opening can be seen on their website at [FranklinFixtures.com](http://FranklinFixtures.com) or reviewed by calling 931-400-0300. “Our secret of success is that we simply never give up.” Said the Uhriks. “There’s always a way and we’re going to keep helping our small business customers find their paths.”

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