

Weekly Restaurant Industry Update with Karen Bremer + Restaurant Reopening Panel Discussion

Friday, May 1, 2020 | 4:30PM EST

General Updates | Karen Bremer, CEO, Georgia Restaurant Association

- **Unemployment Statistics**
 - US 3.8 million more 30.3 million nationwide
 - In the latest report for Georgia, the GDOL processed 266,565 claims, up 19,000 from the week prior
 - Since the middle of March, GDOL has processed 1,369,421 regular initial unemployment claims
- **Restaurant Revenue Projections**
 - Before March 17th:
 - 19,000 restaurants/500,000 workers/Forecasted \$25 billion in Revenue in 2020
 - After March 17th:
 - On average, restaurant operators reported a 78% decline in sales
 - Based on these results, we estimate that the Georgia restaurant and foodservice industry has lost more than \$2.5 billion in sales
- **Georgia Employment Statistics**
 - 91% of Georgia restaurant operators say they have laid off or furloughed employees since the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak in March
 - Based on these results, we estimate that more than 300,000 restaurant employees in Georgia have been laid off or furloughed. This represents at least 75% of restaurant workers.
- **Restaurant Reopening Toolkit**
 - We have created a new [Restaurant Reopening Toolkit](#) that we just launched on our website. It includes the reopening guidelines, reopening best practices, helpful resources, employee training/education, on-demand webinars, and more
 - Included in that toolkit is a [Q&A document](#) that we've created using Governor Kemp's Executive Order issued April 23, 2020
 - The documents we have created explain the Governor's orders and how to comply with them
 - If you have any particularly difficult questions or think there are more things we need to answer, please reach out to us at info@garestaurants.org.
- **ServSafe**
 - Keep in mind that one of the rules stipulates that you have a ServSafe certified manager on premise at your restaurant
 - Food Handler is now free until the end of May. Take advantage of that program and advertise it to your customers so they can see the extra precautions you are taking as a business
 - Servsafe has developed a number of free resources aimed at keeping your workers and the dining public area safe during the Coronavirus pandemic.
 - Resources include: [Food handler](#), [takeout and delivery](#), and [ServSuccess training](#). Please be sure to take advantage of these free resources **before they expire on May 31st**.
- **Legislative Asks**
 - Message to congress, Restaurant Industry ["Blueprint for Recovery"](#)
 - The blueprint outlines how Congress can improve the industry's chances for survival. Centered around a \$240 billion Restaurant and Foodservice Industry Recovery Fund, this plan would provide dedicated government funding, tax credits, and much more to help restaurants prepare for current and future challenges as they recover.

PANELISTS DISCUSSION

Alan LeBlanc, Owner of Brewed to Serve Restaurant Group | *Bold Monk Brewpub, Max Lager's Wood-Fired Grill & Brewery, Richards' Southern Fried, and White Oak Kitchen*

- Our bookings are suffering just like the hotels
- We have had our staff actively engaged in reexamining each concept, repositioning furniture, assessing menus, they are actively engaged in making decisions with us.

- How are we looking at mandates? We try not to. We obviously have rules, but we hate rules. We instill an ideology based off of doing the right thing.
- Change the language of your organization. We no longer clean or wipe down at closing, we “sanitize.”
- This is not a revenue issue, it is a leadership issue, and determining when to open is a leadership decision.

Fred Castellucci, Owner/President, Castellucci Hospitality Group | Bar Mercado,

Cooks & Soldiers, Double Zero, Iberian Pig, Recess, and Sugo

- The way we’ve tried to approach this is: it is not the strongest or most well capitalized that survive; it is the most adaptable to change.
- Changes are happening every day and we are being as fluid as possible.
- The faster that you can move on from the way things were the sooner you can adapt to the way things are and the way things will be.
- You need to prepare yourself for the long haul and make decisions with that mindset
- All of our brands have e-commerce stores, we adjusted to takeout and delivery. We reduced our reliance on uber eats immediately to help save money. Third party delivery platforms are not going to help you survive this. We launched our own delivery service. It isn’t perfect but it gets the job done.
- We try to drive as much traffic as possible to our online markets.
- Our decision to reopen will be made based on the President’s guideline of opening after a 14-day decline in cases.

John C. Metz, Executive Chef/Co-Founder and CEO, Marlow’s Tavern & Sterling

Culinary Management

- The day that we started to ramp down to curbside and delivery is the day we started planning to eventually reopen.
- The way you communicate and the way you lead must be disciplined, organized and transparent. This will help avoid misinterpretation.
- We have 3 locations open. We are taking a very mechanical approach.
- We haven’t told anyone that we’re open yet.
- Take advantage of to go and delivery but only as long as its profitable.
- The people that come out for to go and delivery now are definitely the people who were hunkered down at first. The people who came out at first are going to be the first ones to come back to in-restaurant dining.
- Social distancing procedures are in place to help guests feel at ease.
- Our focus is our team and their comfort is priority. They have been “off” for 8 weeks, so they need to shake the cobwebs off. The smaller capacity will help them get back into a groove.
- Many guests are also calling ahead to see if we are open. It is a far larger number than we expected

Q&A

Q: Fred, what percentage of your current business is delivery?

It started off at 30% and now, depending on the brand, it has gone down to 10-25%. People want to get out of the house, even if it’s just contactless pickup curbside.

Q: Are you providing the workers with face coverings?

Alan is providing masks.

John Metz: wearing a mask “sucks, its super uncomfortable with beards and glasses.” Our team often brings their own and that’s fine as long as it’s clean. We have them available if they’re needed.

Q: are your guests required to wear face coverings?

John: No.

Q: Are you taking employee temperatures?

Fred: Yes, in a walk-in area

Alan: We have a sheet that documents the standardized sanitary questions. We are trying to codify this. If you offer us to take your temperature, we will.

John: We are taking temperatures, but we are not logging them. Be careful of writing that down in case they don’t really relax on what’s allowed

Q: How do you maintain your overall brand while complying with the mandates?

Fred: we are looking at this with a start-up mentality. I told my chefs to forget the name on the restaurant. We are going to start doing food that people want to it. If it works, keep it; if it doesn't, toss it. Our flexible mentalities are applied to every aspect of the restaurant. If your casual brand works with takeout and delivery, keep it up! But for us, it is super important to be flexible.

John: we paired down the menu for takeout and delivery, but as we open, we are still keeping it paired down. This is for customer and client safety as well as taking some of the stress off of a less staffed kitchen

Q: Do you feel that the plexiglass reduces the 6 feet mandate?

We have two booths side by side and in the middle the wall is high, but not high enough. We put plexiglass between the booths to make them little individual cocoons. It works for the code and gives customers peace of mind.

Q: Best practices for social distancing with staff?

Alan: It comes down to how your staff is trained. Now we use remote POS systems to avoid congregation at the register/POS main station. It comes down to habit forming and repetition. Look at your infrastructure and think about what barriers you can create to keep people away from each other as much as possible.

Q: Karen, any update on expansion of packaged beer and wine sales?

We sent letters to every elected county requesting that they extend the to-go beer and wine that they have currently. We have gotten a lot of positive response on that. We have asked the governor to permit mixed drinks to go but haven't gotten a response on that. We have requested that to-go beer and wine become permanent.

Q: is patio seating allowed and does it have the same restrictions as the dining room?

Yes, its allowed. Take your total outdoor square footage and add it to your total square footage and apply the 500 square foot rule.

Q: Are you requiring gloves for your staff?

John: the kitchen has always required gloves and we have always had a strict handwashing policy. Our to-go people wear them because that is essentially a whole separate business with more interaction.

Q: are any of you having trouble getting your staff back to work due to increased unemployment?

Fred: We are running into this a lot. If you are filing unemployment on their behalf, if they turn down the job you can stop filing unemployment. We will still file on your behalf due to the increased hours and wages, so you would still make money. If you ghost us, we will stop filing.

Alan: We have people who will ghost, but we also have people who really are invested in coming back.

Q: Are you taking customer temps?

Resounding NOs all around. it is a turn off to the customer.

Q: Where are you getting the plexiglass dividers from?

John: Home Depot, Lowes, and we have a guy who has them.

Alan: understand your infrastructure and layout. We have large restaurants, so we have a lot of space in which to spread people.

Q: John, are you moving to disposables in the dine-in experience?

No, we haven't. We do rolled silverware and we were considering doing paper napkins. We have separate runners and bussers to avoid cross contamination

Q: John, what have you seen so far in terms of party size? Is it mostly 2 tops, and if it is are you looking at removing booths to accommodate for more?

It is mostly 2 tops. We are turning away people in groups of 7 or more. There are also families of 4 or 5. We are not moving booths.

Q: Are your cooks sharing in the tip pool for curbside and delivery?

When we are not doing dine-in, yes.

Additional Comments:

John Metz

- We aren't 100% sure about how the health department is going to manage reopening.
- As you're starting to open and continuing curbside takeout and delivery, be rigorous with your team's training in terms of best practices and the resources you put in place to be safe.
- Right now, it is a bit of a free-for-all and, as we are all aware of, every municipality has a health inspector who does things a little different. It is important to be ready for those conversations.
- For example, the governor did not give a mandate for how high he wants dividers in between booths to be. Some health inspectors may think that the dividers we installed may be too low and others may think it's just right. Be ready for those conversations, make sure you have your facts.
- We've always had a screening process for sick employees. It was around before the Coronavirus pandemic and it will be here long after it passes. Many people believe that taking employee temperatures will be around as well, so be ready for that.
- A lot of these best practices were things we should have doing long in advance of this crisis. Some of us probably were, but be ready for that as well.
- Make sure your team is aware of all the new changes and precautions because we are leading the charge here and we have the chance (as the state of Georgia) to pave the way for how reopening is done nationally.
- Lastly, I heard about a restaurant that opened in Texas this week and the staff continued "life as normal" and ignored the social distancing upon reopening. While your employees are in your restaurants and on the floor, it is important to enforce the social distancing policies you have in place.
 - Your staff may want to hang out after work like they used to before the pandemic. The restaurant in Texas felt that way. They all went to a party after their shifts. COVID-19 ran through the party and infected enough of the staff so that the restaurant did not have enough people to open again. We don't know if any guests got sick as a result, but this situation has the potential to destroy your reputation and your business.
 - Ask your staff to stay away from others while they are working for you. They should be smart and courteous. Now that things are starting to loosen up a little, it is not the time to relax on health and safety guidelines.

Karen Bremer

I'd like to say thank you to all of our panelists for all of their ideas and thoughts.

Please be sure to look at the documents we put together with the Georgia Department of Public Health and the Governor's legal counsel. If you have any questions, please reach out to us at info@garestaurants.org.

If you have ideas for future webinars or if there are things you'd like us to go more in-depth on, please send these to us.

Whether you are one restaurant with 5 employees, or you are a hundred restaurants with thousands of employees, we are all restaurants. We all serve others and we all take care of people that serve others.

Keep calm, wash your hands, carry on; and God bless everybody.