

The Boston Globe

You can once again get your comfort food 24/7 at beloved N.H. diner chain

By **Matt Berg** Globe Correspondent, Updated April 23, 2020, 11:36 a.m.

When the owners of the Red Arrow 24-Hour Diner chain in New Hampshire made the decision to reduce hours as the coronavirus pandemic worsened, they couldn't find the keys to lock up.

That's how long the diner chain has stayed true to its name.

"We never close, so that's just been our brand since the beginning," said Amanda Wihby, a co-owner and chief operations officer of the chain.

But after a month of shutting the doors at night, the diners in Manchester, Concord, and Londonderry will once again serve loyal customers throughout the early morning hours with pickup and delivery options, the chain announced this week.



The Red Arrow diners across New Hampshire, a popular statewide chain since the 1980s, will resume 24-hour service after a month of reduced hours. RED ARROW DINER

“We are trying to diversify, trying to adapt,” Wihby said. “This is the time that everybody is going to adapt. If you don’t adapt, you’re not going to survive, you know? I think financially we’ll make it through it, but we have to be smart.”

Both the Londonderry and the coming Nashua locations have drive-through windows where workers wearing masks and gloves can safely give food to customers. Delivery has been inconsistent, since this is the chain’s first time implementing the option, but the chain has seen business ramp up since it resumed 24-hour service, Wihby said.

“We’re there for the people that work at night, the truck drivers, the frontline workers, so we had the opportunity to [resume normal hours] and we decided it was time,” she said. “We’ve always seen the diner as the focal point in our community.”

When Governor Chris Sununu temporarily banned sit-down service at restaurants throughout the state in mid-March, Red Arrow faced a tough decision. An emergency meeting was held with the chain’s management, prioritizing the safety of employees and customers while deciding what a reduction of hours would mean for the brand.

At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the third shift, which runs late into the night and far longer than many other restaurants in the area, had to go. For the foreseeable future, all locations would serve customers by delivery or curbside pickup from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

“We definitely took a large hit closing the dining rooms. Takeout has been a small fraction of what we were doing,” Wihby said.

Red Arrow employs approximately 150 workers across the state, Wihby said. With reduced hours, adjustments had to be made — no workers were laid off or furloughed, but some opted to stay home while hours were reduced, including several at the Concord location that employs about 65 workers.

“We first asked our employees if we had any volunteers, and we did have a select few who did want to stay at home,” said David McClellan, manager of the Concord location.

On Monday, some of those employees came back to the kitchen. The Red Arrow diners in Manchester and Concord resumed normal hours of operation,

bringing back the third shift and the night owls who accompany it, and the Londonderry location will resume normal hours next week.



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from the account 'Red Arrow Diner' (@RedArrow24Diner). The tweet text reads: 'We have some diner-rific news: Red Arrow Diner's #ManchesterNH & #ConcordNH locations are resuming normal 24/7 operating hours! 🎉🎉 Londonderry's hours (includes drive-thru!): Sun-Thurs 7am-9pm & Fri-Sat 7am-10pm View our full menu: ow.ly/ktjT50zitEn'. Below the text is a promotional graphic with a teal background. On the left is the Red Arrow Diner logo, a smiling character with a red arrow through its head. To the right, the text says 'Homestyle Meals to Nourish the Body and Soul'. Below that, it lists 'Manchester & Concord Open 24/7' and 'Londonderry Open Sun-Thurs 7am-9pm & Fri-Sat 7am-10pm'. A large clock icon is on the right side of the graphic. The tweet is timestamped '8:10 AM · Apr 20, 2020' and has 2 likes. A link to see other tweets is also visible.

Red Arrow Diner
@RedArrow24Diner

We have some diner-rific news: Red Arrow Diner's #ManchesterNH & #ConcordNH locations are resuming normal 24/7 operating hours! 🎉🎉
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The Red Arrow 24 HR DINER
Manchester • Concord • Londonderry • Nashua

Homestyle Meals to Nourish the Body and Soul

Manchester & Concord
Open 24/7

Londonderry
Open Sun-Thurs 7am-9pm & Fri-Sat 7am-10pm

8:10 AM · Apr 20, 2020

2 See Red Arrow Diner's other Tweets

Frequent customers include police officers, firefighters, and utility workers who don't get off work until late at night, McClellan said.

With the three locations and a fourth opening in Nashua next week, the chain has been a mainstay in New Hampshire since the 1980s. Altogether, the diners serve about 500,000 breakfasts every year, according to the company's website.



The Red Arrow diners have been a popular statewide chain, especially for night workers, since the 1980s. RED ARROW DINER

Hearty portions of comfort food, from chicken tenders to spaghetti and meatballs, along with classic breakfast eats like omelettes paired with hash browns have kept customers coming back for decades, and it's the food that some workers believe is helping people through the tough times.

“I think folks out there, they seek comfort food, especially during this time,” McClellan said. “Everyone is at home, sitting with their families, and we provide those comforting foods that people can relate to and bring back that childhood memory that mom used to make.”

Special family-sized dinners were added to the menu, offering some of the diners' most popular food in bulk — turkey dinner, burgers, chicken Parmesan — enough to feed a family for under \$30. The Concord location has sold “a great deal” of those meals as people long for comfort food to bring home while on a budget, McClellan said.

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