

What's the Future of Local Restaurants?

Restauranting in the time of COVID-19 presents a series of challenges never seen before. Here's how some Granite State establishments are dealing with the situation.

October 13, 2020 by [Anders Morley](#)



"Online ordering has been off the wall. We need an employee just to answer the phones in all our locations."— Carol Lawrence, co-owner of the Red Arrow Diners. Photo by Jared Charney

Carol Lawrence is one of three owners of another New Hampshire minichain, the **Red Arrow Diner**, which was bold enough to open a new location during the pandemic. "It was extremely challenging," she tells me. The Nashua diner opened a few months later than the planned spring date in a way that was informed by lessons learned in the other

three locations. “We just found out what was required and did whatever we needed to do to conform,” says Lawrence.

All Red Arrow restaurants are usually open 24 hours, but at the moment only Manchester is functioning around the clock all week long. The reason is a staff shortage. “Many employees prefer to collect unemployment,” Lawrence says. “This is just beginning to change. I say ‘kudos’ to our loyal Red Arrow family who stuck with us and kept on working.”

Fortunately, the business has discovered new revenue streams likely to persist beyond COVID-19. “Online ordering has been off the wall. We need an employee just to answer the phones in all our locations,” Lawrence says. Outside seating will also likely become a permanent seasonal fixture.

Thanks to this diversification, things have been going pretty well. Lawrence estimates total sales in Manchester are up by 8-9% over last year, while Londonderry sales are slightly down, and Concord is about the same.

If she could go back to March and talk to herself as she was then, Lawrence says she would tell herself “to have more faith day to day. I’d say, ‘Be more confident in yourselves. Be more positive.’ I’d say, ‘You know, we got used to masks. It’s actually OK.’”

She admits that she’s nervous about winter, but ends with a sober statement of fact: “Lots of restaurants have closed. Things happen in the world.”

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