Murphy's Law
A Buildout Primer for Startup Restaurants

Hope for the best and be prepared for the worst.
It's good advice when attempting to tackle any challenging project,
but it particularly applies to restaurant buildout projects.

By Howard Riell

Whether you are planning to outfit an existing space for a restaurant or updating your restaurant with an extensive remodel, your best approach is to proceed with caution.

A 'Pandora's Box'

"Bring an architect and engineer to the site to determine if the space was previously operating legally," advises Arlene Spiegel, FCSI, President of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. "Research and confirm the proper filing with the building department. Determine whether the power and structural aspects will enable the new concept, and whether the HVAC and fire systems are in compliance."

Once the construction documents and the food service equipment specifications are drawn, at least three qualifying contractors should do a walk-thru of the space and provide a comprehensive bid. "Go see previous projects the contractors have completed," Spiegel says. "Check with references that worked with the contractor on similar type projects."

An important rule of thumb is to try to design the new area to capture the economies of the existing infrastructure, says Spiegel, such as HVAC and both mechanical and engineering systems.

Once the contractor develops a schedule of performance, the fees required, including permitting and licensing fee, will be laid out so the operator can plan his cash flow. The restaurant will need general liability and property insurance, and to ensure that the contractor has workman's compensation insurance as well as errors-and-omissions insurance.

Saving time and money can be accomplished by starting with a detailed plan, executing it well, and working with top-quality professionals.

Surrounding yourself with good advisors is critical going into the process. The money paid to the lawyer, accountant, architect and others will be worth it. **RS&G**