



GOOD NEWS FOR NEW YORKERS!

The hugely popular “Open Restaurants” program will be made permanent.

By Jacquetta Picton

“Open Restaurants was a big, bold experiment in supporting the restaurant industry and reimagining our public space - and it worked,” Mayor de Blasio said in a statement. “We’re proud to extend and expand this effort to keep NYC the most vibrant city in the world. It’s time for a new tradition.”

The program, which is credited with saving 90,000 jobs in the hospitality sector, was rolled out in late June as part of phase two of the city authorities’ plan to reopen businesses after the pause caused by Covid-19. It has closed off a number of city streets and sets out rules and regulations under which restaurants can set up outdoor eating areas on sidewalks outside their premises. Encouraging diners back to premises and away from takeout and delivery was the aim. It recognized that many people feel more relaxed about socializing in an outdoor environment. As Arlene Spiegel FCSI of New York-based Arlene Spiegel and Associates says: “The dining out public is still more apt to return to restaurants that have outdoor space. They deem it safer.”

Adaptable and flexible

A massive boost for the outdoor dining concept also came from architect David Rockwell, his design studio is

behind projects such as Oceans New York restaurant in the city and Palms Casino and Resort, Las Vegas. He has designed an adaptable and modular outdoor dining system that allows businesses to operate under the current health guidelines and creates places for diners to feel safe and comfortable. The aim is to keep costs low and the set-up flexible.

Extending the Open Restaurants program means diners will, inevitably, be braving colder weather. New York winters are, without doubt, harsh. “As the cold weather approaches, New York operators are scrambling to buy heating lamps and enclosures to extend the season,” says Spiegel. However, the rules are clear that if outdoor seating is enclosed at all to allow for easier heating then the 25% occupancy rate that applies to indoor dining will apply to outdoor dining as well.

The move has been widely welcomed by operators and diners alike and is seen as a win by restaurants across the city. In what has been a disastrous year thanks to Covid-19, any way to keep a revenue stream going is seen as a great idea. Spiegel sums it up, saying: “As with any new process, there will be hits and misses, but operators must try to keep the cash flow going or else hand in the keys to the landlords.” ■