

FOODSERVICE FOR THE FUTURE

It was not business as usual when **Arlene Spiegel FCSI** got to work at a project in Oklahoma. She tells how the pandemic forced changes to foodservice design, as well as new ways of planning for future business interruptions.



The Food Hall at the Cherokee Casino & Hotel West Siloam Springs in Oklahoma needed to serve a very specific purpose: create a dining model to replace the pre-pandemic shutdown, all-you-can-eat buffet while giving management more control over its hours of operation, the variety of foods offered, and multiple choices of ordering and delivering food to the guests. So, when Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Cherokee Nation Entertainment reached out to **Arlene Spiegel FCSI, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City,** to figure out what to do with its buffet restaurant following its shutdown, the veteran consultant created a food hall model for them.

Catering to a Covid world

The buffet model proved to be “troublesome in a Covid world,” Spiegel explains, as it provided very little control over maintaining safe distances for guests in the queue. “A buffet model is used to provide an overabundance of food made in large quantities throughout the day and night,” says Spiegel. **“A food hall model has focused, limited menus and allows food to be made in smaller quantities based on demand.”**

Reimagining the concept

“We utilized the old back of house from the buffet and created seven new, flexible concepts in the front of the house,” says Spiegel. “It really is brilliant and it is already being lauded as a big hit.”

While the operators were “nimble and creative” in their efforts to provide food for the guests at the buffet, Spiegel recalls, it became obvious that the space needed to be redesigned with flexibility in mind. “The food hall model was the perfect solution as each of the concepts offered more elevated, authentic, restaurant quality foods providing seven different cuisines to choose from.”

Designing flexibility

“Business interruptions can and will take place, and operators now realize that they need to design their foodservice programs to be flexible. In fact, designing flexibility is a key criterion for success, regardless of the type of operation,” says Spiegel.

In a host environment, a food operation needs to be prepared to deliver food to guests on property. This includes being able to receive orders from a website, app, mobile kiosks, and mobile phones in case the venue cannot accommodate traditional seating.

Chefs have also developed limited menus that can travel well and have tested the products in both ceramic and disposable take-out packaging. **“Being prepared to operate with the least amount of disruption is now part of the training in smart operations.”** ■