

A GHOST STORY

How Local Restaurateurs Are Cashing In on Ghost Kitchen Phenomenon

BY KARA C. RODRIGUEZ

krodriguez@loudounnow.com

The word “pivot” has become synonymous with business plans and models in the era of COVID-19, as entrepreneurs work for ways to increase their revenue in uncertain economic times. The hospitality industry, one of the hardest hit during the pandemic, is no exception.

But in a time where many would subscribe to belt tightening, local restaurateurs are instead launching new concepts. You won't see these restaurants on monument signs or plastered on building facades. These “ghost kitchens” are born out of the imagination and ingenuity of local chefs and restaurant owners, who produce their new menu items in the same grills and ovens of their brick-and-mortar restaurants, offering new cuisine in a largely delivery-only format to cash in on the growing online ordering phenomenon.

Nationwide, more than 110,000 eating and drinking establishments closed temporarily or permanently in 2020, including many in Loudoun County, according to the National Restaurant Association. While profits shrank dramatically, particularly in the early spring of 2020 when indoor dining was prohibited, one sector of the restaurant business reported massive increases—online ordering. With many people isolated by choice or necessity, online delivery orders, either through third-party services or directly from restaurants, accounted for \$45 billion nationwide in 2020. That's up from \$30 billion in online sales in 2017 and ahead of the \$41 billion pre-COVID prediction for 2020 from Alphawise.

A year since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived stateside,



Norman K. Styer/Loudoun Now

Chef Stephon Washington, executive chef of the Holiday Inn Dulles, whips up his specialty Jamaican dishes in the kitchen of O'Malley's Pub. Washington, with the support of B.F. Saul Company, recently launched Grandpa Hank's, a ghost kitchen named in honor of his great grandfather, a Jamaican native.

ghost kitchens are cropping up in all corners of Loudoun County. Hospitality leaders are optimistic that their creativity and new culinary offerings will make 2021 a successful business year, and offer them exposure to more hungry customers.

Ghost Kitchen LoCo

Ghost kitchen of Kovi Kitchen
GhostKitchenLoco.com

Dean Boeving and Wes Guptill saw their restaurant profits drop 80% from one weekend to the next when COVID arrived last spring. So, they took to the streets. For sometimes six days a week through the summer, they would load up the Kovi Kitchen food truck and schedule visits to local neighborhoods, offering pre-orders of Kovi cuisine, as well as walk-up orders. It was a business decision that was key to the business' survival, Boeving acknowledged, but as the summer months marched on their exhaustion made them realize it may not be a sustainable business model.

Once businesses began to reopen, food truck sales start-



Kara C. Rodriguez/Loudoun Now

A steakhouse burger and kimchi fries can be ordered together with Ghost Kitchen LoCo's new menus.

GHOST KITCHENS continues on page 14

Goodfriend Answers Vaccination Questions

BY RENSS GREENE

rgreene@loudounnow.com

Over the weekend, Loudoun County surpassed the 76,000-shot mark in its COVID-19 vaccination effort, with nearly 25,000 residents fully vaccinated. But there's still confusion over when those still waiting for the shots will get their chance.

During a recent Facebook Live forum, Health Director Dr. David Goodfriend tried to provide assurances to those eager to get a COVID-19 vaccine—and those frustrated or worried by the wait.

Many of the questions came from people worried or confused by the changed system for registering to be vaccinated, and the state's delay in getting that system fully functional. Local health departments like Loudoun which had already begun taking signups for the vaccine were in-

structed in early February to shut those sites down and send their lists to the state to add to a central, statewide system. Signups for vaccination appointments are now at vaccinate.virginia.gov. But that statewide system has been slow to catch up—some Loudouners report they still cannot find their information on the Virginia Department of Health site, prompting them to worry that their names were lost in the shuffle.

Goodfriend assured participants in the Feb. 24 session that they were not.

“If anyone is concerned they can mail me at health@loudoun.gov with your name and we'll look it up for you and let you know where you are on the list,” Goodfriend said. “If you're fine with the understanding that we have your place in line, you don't need to do that. But if you need that and want that reassurance, don't

hesitate to email us.”

Further confusing the issue, CVS pharmacy, which is offering shots at its Lansdowne store, is taking signups separately on its own site, with more pharmacies expected to begin enrolling soon.

And in Northern Virginia, because the Fairfax County Health Department is administered differently—locally operated—that health department stayed with its local registration system while the rest of the state switched to the statewide system. Goodfriend explained Loudoun did not have that choice.

Senate Bill 1221, introduced by Sen. Barbara A. Favola (D-31), which would allow Loudoun to also locally operate its health department, has passed the General Assembly and is waiting on the governor's signature.

Goodfriend also said he expects the

state's website to improve over time.

“There are privacy issues with the state system, just like we have privacy issues,” Goodfriend said. “The information you gave us when you signed up is private information. So there's only so much that we want to be able to share with folks without some way of vetting who is asking for that information and if they have a right to it.”

But the waits will continue. Goodfriend said even with the approval of a third vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson, he expected it will be another two months before the state is ready to move on to the third phase of vaccines, Phase 1c, which includes many utility workers, food service workers, transportation and logistics workers, information technology employees, legal services employees, members of the media, and others.

However, President Joe Biden on Tuesday offered a more optimistic outlook, predicting that all adults could be vaccinated by the end of May. ■

Ghost kitchens

continued from page 3

ed to decline, so the duo knew it was time to think outside the box a little bit more. Pre-COVID, they had been looking to franchise Kovi, but put those plans on ice with the shift in the economy. But it was the franchising company they were working with that first gave them the idea for creating a ghost kitchen.

Boeving looked to his existing staff, which included a chef with an Italian background and Latinx cooks, and realized he already had what he needed to launch several different culinary concepts. They relied on 30 locals in their foodies group to taste test different menu offerings, and, just as importantly, asked them what they would like to see offered. Ghost Kitchen LoCo was born. The idea of offering so many different menus, from Kovi's Asian street food offerings, to Italian, to wings, to empanadas, to gastropub fare including 32-ounce tomahawk steaks, to bubble teas, shakes, sweets and even a keto menu, was to have something for everyone, Boeving said.

As an example, he points to a family deciding what to order for dinner. One kid wants pizza, someone wants a burger, mom or dad wants steak. With Ghost Kitchen LoCo, customers can order from several different menus, all in one transaction.

While Ghost Kitchen LoCo will use third-party delivery services, Boeving said he wants to "create revolution" by employing their own set of drivers to ensure the customer service the restaurant is known for carries over to its food order deliveries.

He said it would be a "good problem to have," to have to hire more employees to meet that need, but they will see how sales numbers come in for the ghost kitchen first. They are also looking to add a subscription service, which would waive delivery fees for subscribers, include an invite to a quarterly fan club party, and other perks.

Ghost Kitchen LoCo is expected to launch soon. Follow the company's website and Facebook page, facebook.com/ghost-kitchenloco, to stay up to date.

DC Wings/James Dairy Bar

Ghost kitchens of Delirium Cafe and Wild Wood Pizza
DCWings.com, JamesDairyBar.com

Launching new restaurant concepts is like breathing for serial restaurateur Curtis Allred. So launching multiple ghost kitchen concepts simultaneously is perhaps not as daunting for him as it would be for others. It's about feeding that creative desire to make something, he said.



Douglas Graham/Loudoun Now

A gelato stands ready to be enjoyed at Wild Wood Pizza, the production location of the James Dairy Bar ghost kitchen.

"It definitely allows you to do that without the amount of risk as far as cash to invest into brick-and-mortar facility improvements and those kinds of things," he said.

But Allred acknowledged it also comes with its own set of challenges. While he has the space and staffing to accommodate the new concepts, "it requires a significant amount of versatility," he said. That means training staff to produce multiple concepts of food and different menus all in the same kitchen in a restaurant that also is offering table service for customers.

Allred recently launched DC Wings out of his downtown Leesburg Delirium Cafe USA. He said the restaurant's wing offerings had grown in popularity. He learned his recipe from former Kovi proprietor Vi Nguyen, and uses potato starch in the breading instead of flour to produce crispier, less oily wings. The wings come with sauces or rubbed in dry spices, and DC Wings also offers a keto wing with no breading or sauce for the lower carb crowd. Burgers, fries and brews, including more domestic brands, round out the menu.

James Dairy Bar also is set for its debut. Run out of Wild Wood Pizza, the offering is named after Allred's great uncle, a 104-year-old World War II veteran who opened up his own dairy bar in Raleigh, NC, shortly after returning from war. The ice cream and gelato are made in house, using all-natural ingredients. The kitchen has the ability to produce 70 gallons of ice cream a day, and Allred said he sees the potential for a brick-and-mortar operation for James down the road.

Allred also plans for the launch of two more ghost kitchen concepts—the Affordable Pizza Concept, or APC, which offers simple, inexpensive, classic pizzas all for under \$10, and a return of his Balls of Glory meatball menu, which formerly had a brick-and-mortar presence on Loudoun

Street in Leesburg. APC is expected to also launch this month, and Allred said he expects Balls of Glory to return in April. All ghost kitchen concepts will offer beer, wine and cocktail deliveries as well.

"There's no shortage of ideas," Allred said. "We'll see where the market goes with it."



Norman K. Styer/Loudoun Now

A Jamaican dish by Chef Stephon Washington of Grandpa Hank's.

Grandpa Hank's

Ghost kitchen of O'Malley's Pub
OmalleysSterling.com

Matt Stiers, area director of food and beverage for the Holiday Inn Dulles, said a common request from guests on the hotel's catering menu was Chef Stephon Washington's Jamaican dishes. His red beans and rice, jerk chicken, and other staple dishes had caught a following, and Stiers and Washington had an idea.

"Really for me it was a chance to really do something that kind of represented me in a sense. It was pretty much a shot for me to have my own influence, to have my own piece of me to give to the world," Washington said.

Grandpa Hank's, named for Washington's Jamaican great-grandfather, was recently launched out of the O'Malley's Pub kitchen at the Holiday Inn Dulles, where Washington serves as executive chef. His great-grandfather always told him to cook from the heart, and that's exactly what Washington has been doing with his new concept.

"I'm having a ball," he said.

His great-grandfather referred to creating Jamaican cuisine as "loving cooking" that you have to watch over and babysit. He uses all natural ingredients, from star anise, cinnamon and citrus fruits to add to the flavor.

While the duo thought the jerk chicken would be Grandpa Hank's best seller, other

Caribbean favorites like oxtail and curried goat have been quite popular, Washington said.

Stiers credits parent company B.F. Saul for being a forward-thinking group, amenable to running a ghost kitchen concept out of their already busy O'Malley's kitchen. He said if Grandpa Hank's continues its success, it's a concept that may be replicated in other hotels, or even a brick-and-mortar establishment.

"There are possibilities if this goes even better than right now, we have a potential of even doing other ghost kitchens with other hotels in our portfolio. If we get a brick-and-mortar restaurant at one point that would be amazing. If we're still showing the revenue numbers we are now there's the potential to drive this to our Tysons Corner and Crystal City markets," he said.



Contributed

An Italian specialty courtesy of Paulie's Italian Kitchen.

Paulie's Italian Kitchen

Ghost kitchen of The Wine Kitchen
PauliesItalian.com

Jason Miller, owner of The Wine Kitchen, with locations in Leesburg and Frederick, MD, saw the news coverage of national chains opening up their kitchens to other restaurants to let them produce their own menus, so he got to thinking.

"We tried to figure out another way we could cross-utilize the other stuff we were doing in our restaurants to create a new restaurant without creating a whole new restaurant," he said. "I would make the analogy, if you have one line in the water you might only catch one fish at a time, but a ghost concept allows us to have two lines in the water. It's the same restaurant, equipment, and people, but a different face and dishes."

Miller launched Paulie's Italian Kitchen in November, and said early returns are it's a success.

GHOST KITCHENS continues on page 15

Ghost kitchens

continued from page 14

“We wanted it to help us through the winter. We knew we only had seven tables in the restaurant. We needed to have more capacity and the only way to do that was outside of the four walls,” he said.

The Wine Kitchen was already producing its own pastas, so adding in sauces and custom-made Italian dishes was not such a leap. While The Wine Kitchen’s menu changes with the seasons, Paulie’s offers the Italian comfort food—spaghetti and meatballs, shrimp fra diavolo, three cheese ravioli and lasagna— throughout the year. The menu is rounded out with a selection of salads, desserts and, of course, wines.

Paulie’s fare can be ordered on its website and delivered via Doordash.

Miller said he believes ghost kitchens are here to stay.

“Restaurants just have to find novel ways to create revenue. That is going to be the key to our existence and success moving forward,” he said.



Contributed

The OG Burrito, courtesy of Savage Burrito.

Savage Burrito

Ghost kitchen of Uncle Julio’s
SavageBurrito.com

Kevin Tallungan has been with Uncle Julio’s for 27 of its 35 years, and, unsurprisingly, past year was like no other. The director of operations for the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, Tallungan dreads reports one of the hardest days of his hospitality life when he had to lay off dozens of employees across the franchise’s 10 restaurants when COVID’s economic impacts hit last spring.

A proven hospitality concept, “we’ve never really had to reinvent ourselves,” but 2020 changed that.

Now, Tallungan is ebullient about Uncle Julio’s new ghost kitchen concept, Savage

Burrito.

“We had never done burritos, never offered them, but a lot of people would ask,” he said. “The positioning of our brand, being an upscale brand, burritos didn’t necessarily fit who we were trying to be. Little did we know that was just a big old softball sitting there for us. The burrito business is enormous.”

As company executives began brainstorming what concept they could launch as the ghost kitchen phenomenon took hold last year, they soon realized that Uncle Julio’s staff had the capability and know-how to make completely unique and high-quality burritos, available via delivery only.

While every item on the Savage Burrito menu can be modified, and create your own is always a popular choice, Tallungan lists off some of the popular items. There’s a Nashville hot chicken burrito, a spicy steakhouse burrito, and a burrito known as the OG, which boasts an “old school flava.” Tortillas are infused with a signature flavor portfolio, utilizing ingredients like jalapeños and chilula. Also offered are burrito bowls or salads, side items like chips and queso, desserts and the ideal beverages to wash down a burrito—margarita pops, beer, and soft drinks.

While Savage Burrito has only been around seven weeks, the responses so far have been tremendous, Tallungan said.



Contributed

Walker’s produces its own waffles made from gluten-free flour.

Walker’s Waffle House

Ghost kitchen of ResQ BBQ
facebook.com/walkerswaffles

Chuck Meyer was fully prepared to launch a ghost kitchen last year when business dried up at Evergreen Sportsplex, where his ResQ BBQ is the official concessionaire. With his Italian background, he looked to launch an Italian concept, but decided to go in another direction with the launch of Paulie’s Italian Kitchen and his friendships with local pizza purveyors. He

and his wife welcomed a grandson, Walker, and an idea was born.

Walker’s Waffle House “really doesn’t change our menu a lot,” he said. “It’s just a different vessel to serve the food on.”

Now, customers can enjoy a waffle sandwich featuring all of the meats that ResQ BBQ already had developed a fanbase for—smoked turkey and ham, pulled pork, and more. Walker’s also offers its own unique menu items, from a barbecue version of the Cuban sandwich to chicken and waffle sandwiches with options for spicy, buffalo bleu and maple bourbon. Breakfast sandwiches that include sausage, a pork roll, and bacon are also included.

“We probably could’ve put about 20 different sandwiches on there. The menu is a little bigger than we wanted to start with but it’s working out well,” he said.

The waffles are all gluten free, homemade with their own flour and flavor, Meyer said, and will definitely fill up many a hungry belly.

“We call them mighty sandwiches. Each sandwich comes with two 4”x6” waffles.

That’s a pretty big waffle. It’s definitely a full meal,” he said.

Customers can walk up to ResQ BBQ’s Evergreen Sportsplex space to order from Walker’s menu, or order on a third-party delivery site, or even Walker’s own site. ■

PUBLISHER’S NOTICE

We are pledged to the letter and spirit of Virginia’s policy for achieving equal housing opportunity throughout the Commonwealth. We encourage and support advertising and marketing programs in which there are no barriers to obtaining housing because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status or handicap.

All real estate advertised herein is subject to Virginia’s fair housing law which makes it illegal to advertise “any preference, limitation or discrimination because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, elderliness, familial status or handicap or intention to make any such preference, limitation, or discrimination.”

This newspaper will not knowingly accept advertising for real estate that violates the fair housing law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertised in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis. For more information or to file a housing complaint call the Virginia Fair Housing Office at (804) 367-9753.

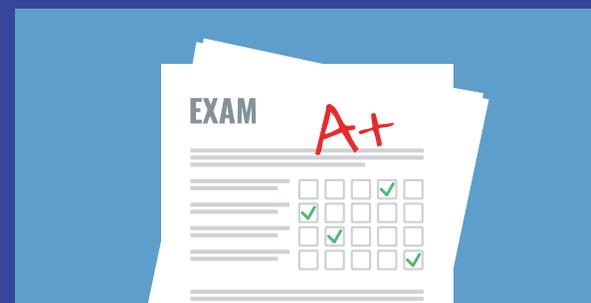


fairhousing@dpor.virginia.gov · www.fairhousing.vipnet.org



We do the work. You get the credit.

From memorial funds, to scholarship funds, to donor-advised funds, we can help you make a difference that never ends.



Work with us to ensure the fabric of our community and your charitable values knit together in the most strategic way.

Won’t You Join Us?

CommunityFoundationLF.org • (703) 779-3505

LoudounNow

WOMEN'S
HEALTH
SECTION
INSIDE

VOL. 6, NO. 25

We've got you covered. In the mail weekly. Online always at LoudounNow.com

MAY 20, 2021

Businesses Prepare for Full Crowds

BY RENSS GREENE
rgreene@loudounnow.com

Memorial Day weekend will likely be an extra busy one for restaurants, craft beverage makers and shops.

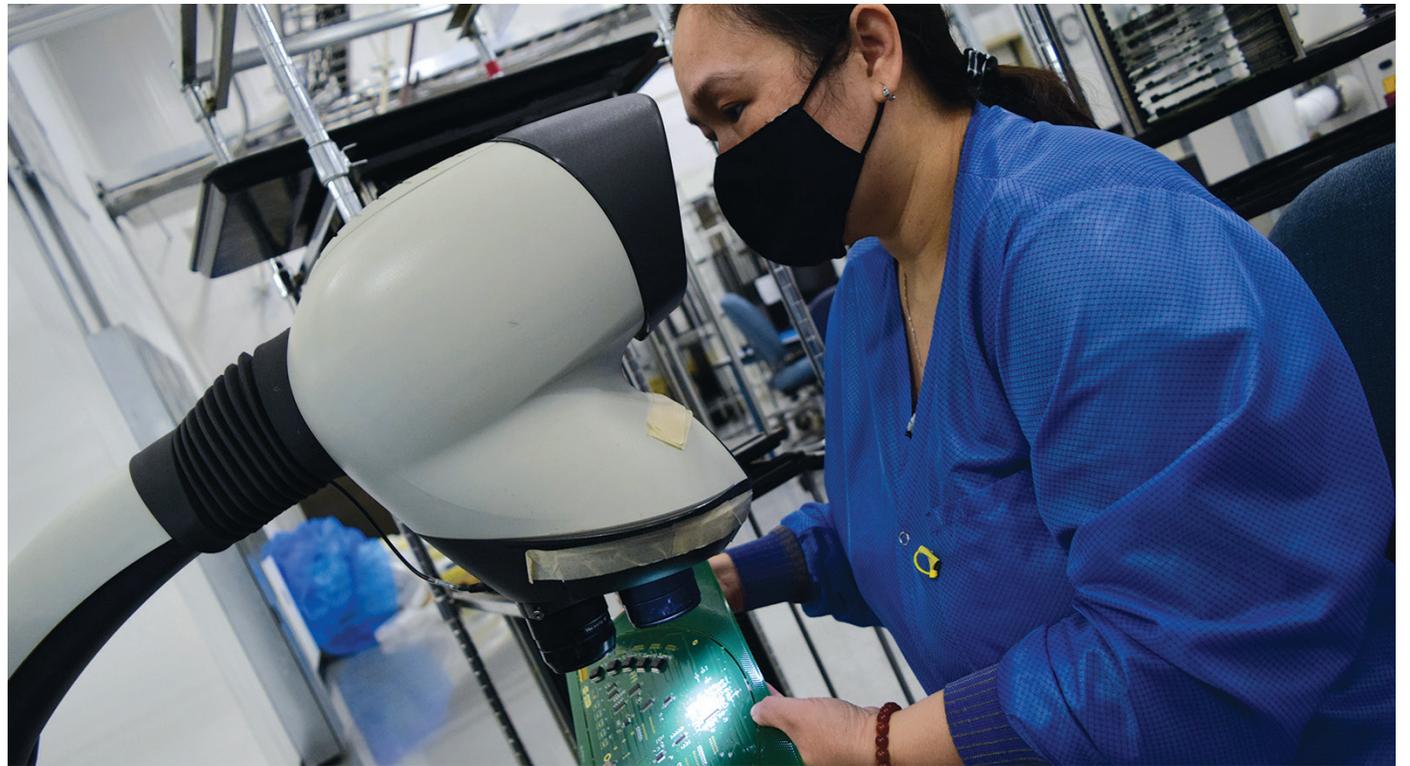
That's because on Friday, May 28, Virginia will lift the distancing and capacity restrictions that have been in place for more than a year to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Ralph Northam announced late last week. And hospitality businesses are getting ready to relearn how to run a packed venue.

"I was happy when he said June 15 a couple weeks ago, and then when he came out on Friday and said May 28 full capacity, that made me really nervous, because we're not there yet," said Tony Stafford, founder of Ford's Fish Shack.

Even before the pandemic, Stafford had warned of the difficulty hiring restaurant staff in Loudoun. The COVID concerns and higher unemployment benefits have made it even harder to hire people for what restaurants have historically paid—often less than the current unemployment benefit of up to \$678 a week in Virginia, and well below Loudoun's living wage of \$19.92 an hour for a single person with no children, according to MIT's Living Wage Calculator.

"We're relying on a lot of friends to help us right now," said Buford's Bis-

CROWDS continues on page 34



Patrick Szabo/Loudoun Now

EIT in Leesburg, one of the largest electronics contract manufacturers serving the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast U.S. regions, is among the many local companies that have seen its business hit hard by supply chain shortages. For EIT, that has meant delays of 40 to 50 weeks in securing needed integrated circuits.

Local Businesses Struggling with Supply Chain Shortages

BY KARA C. RODRIGUEZ
krodriguez@loudounnow.com

Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic for businesses both locally and globally looks to be constrained by supply chain shortages and bottlenecks. At a time when consumer confidence is returning and vaccine supply growing, these shortages are resulting in delays and unhappy customers.

Last week's gasoline shortage caused by

the Colonial Pipeline ransomware shutdown gave residents a taste of the frustration experience by many businesses during the past year.

Business owners and economic pundits point to a variety of factors causing the backlogs. The six-day back-up at the Suez Canal, when the ship Ever Given ran aground in late March, caused maritime shipping to grind almost to a halt. Even earlier, production at many facilities around the globe stopped almost completely when

the pandemic hit last spring, and is one of the many factors blamed for the nationwide lumber shortage and skyrocketing prices.

One local company even points to the February power crisis in Texas, caused by severe winter storms that left thousands of homeowners without power in freezing temperatures. Jerald Roberts, an Ashburn resident and owner of Five Star Painting, pointed out that some of the nation's biggest

SHORTAGES continues on page 35

Postal Customer
ECRWSS





HARTLEY
HOME EXTERIORS
ROOFING • WINDOWS • SIDING

540-441-7649
HartleyHomeExteriors.com

Girl Scout cookies are sold door to door...
not the roof on your house.

Trust a **LOCAL** Roofing Professional,
not someone that knocks on your door.



The Best Choice for Roofing Replacement

Shortages

continued from page 1

paint producers have their factories in the Lone Star state.

“When they had that freeze all the supply froze and when paint freezes it’s no longer good,” he said.

Five Star also does a lot of jobs that involve finish carpentry and replacing wood, so the lumber shortage has been just as big a pill to swallow.

“It’s made it increasingly more difficult to estimate complete jobs,” he said. “I had an estimate I did recently where the quote from the [lumber] supplier came back to be five times what I thought it would be, because there is no supply.”

It’s all amounted to what Roberts characterizes as his “worst nightmare” as a business owner. The short supply of paint has caused him to either refund his customers, or change to a lower or higher quality of paint, and eat the difference as a business owner, depending on availability. But he can’t absorb a five-fold price increase, he acknowledges. It can also add time to a project, as he and his employees have to run to multiple stores to buy the paint or lumber they need, depending on where the supply is available. In pre-supply chain constrained times, a trip to Sherwin Williams or Home Depot or Lowes could serve as a one-stop shop for his company’s needs.

The timing couldn’t be worse, Roberts said, as his business is busier than ever.

“We have been so busy that at the end of the second week of April we completely turned off all of our marketing,” he said.

Business is just as hot in the real estate industry and for new home construction, which has also been hampered by seemingly

endless supply chain issues.

“I would say a new supply chain issue pops up day to day,” said Kirsten Langhorne, managing director of Lansdowne-based Langhorne Custom Homes.

Langhorne said she is hearing stories from all of the suppliers she works with, on everything from the lumber shortage to getting snap ties for concrete work, or R-38 insulation.

“Some of it is just really long delays [in production]. Some suppliers won’t give us a delivery date because they can’t predict it for themselves. There’s so much going on and supplies are so short. If a supplier isn’t convinced they’ll be able to supply [a product] they won’t even give us a price off of which we can budget,” she said.

The ripple effect means delays in construction for Langhorne and other builders. She estimates the delays in acquiring needed supplies is adding about 15% onto construction time. She said their suppliers and contractors are constantly trying to stay vigilant on what may be in demand and in short supply in coming months, and Langhorne said her company pre-purchased lumber when it heard of a looming shortage.

Langhorne pegs the beginning of the supply chain shortfall to last summer, when many manufacturers were having trouble keeping lines fully staffed because of the pandemic. She also attributes supply chain struggles to Texas’ wild winter weather.

Supply constraints are even affecting what local restaurants can put on your plate. Kevin Bednarz, owner of The Ashburn Pub, said “every week it’s something different.”

“When it first started a year ago there was a run on to-go boxes. Then ground beef went crazy. Just this week I can’t get sour mix; I’ve had to order it off Amazon. It’s a matter of always being on your toes,” he said.

In addition to frequenting the global e-commerce giant, Bednarz, his wife and his general manager have made the rounds at Restaurant Depot, and also borrowed and traded products with other area restaurants.

“Not having a staple product even just for one week costs you time and energy. We’ve been ordering a couple hundred cases a week, so when one or two things go down, we’ve got to scramble to find it. But we’ve been really fortunate,” he said.

Bednarz refuses to pass higher costs onto customers with the label of “due to COVID-19.”

“I hate those three words,” he said. “So, we just work our butts off.”

For the most part, he said his menu and alcohol offerings have been able to stay intact. But in some cases it has caused him to change his restaurant’s featured items. With the price of snow crab legs skyrocketing, Bednarz said he is looking at alternate products for his traditional Sunday summertime special.

Restaurateur Curtis Allred said the nationwide supply chain shortages are just another argument for buying local. For supplies for his restaurants, Delirium Cafe USA and Wild Wood Pizza in Leesburg along with several ghost kitchen concepts, he is seeing strong increases in price from suppliers, particularly on things like chicken wings, fry oil, and ground beef.

“We have had to either change vendors, change products, or not change and just not carry it. We were already looking at some significant seasonal menu changes for the warmer months; this just hastens that. This is when buying local really makes sense. Local vendors are smaller vendors and not quite as subject to major impacts like regional or national producers,” he said.

Even some of the largest Loudoun man-

ufacturers are not immune to the whims of the supply chain. Joe May, chairman of the board and chief technology officer of EIT in Leesburg, said the integrated circuits his company relies on for many of its products are facing staggering production delays.

“We’ve got some business in house that is going to be 40 or 50 weeks before we’re able to get the necessary components required to complete the order. I’m sure we’ll find some way around it, but it’s not going to be ideal, and it’s not going to be in a timely manner,” he said.

May points to the rising popularity of electric cars, which perhaps will only gain more of a following after last week’s East Coast fuel shortage.

“Electric cars in particular are consuming a whopping amount of integrated circuits,” May said. “Some of that is eating into the supply of other integrated circuits. There’s finite capacity and a lot of effort is being put in filling automotive requirements. There’s just no easy way around it—you can’t build an integrated circuit factory in six months.”

May believes COVID-19 was an “aggravator” for the supply chain issues his company is facing, but not the sole culprit. Looking into the future, with some car companies forecasting a switch to an all-electric fleet in a matter of years, and some airplanes moving away from fuel to electric components, he believes it will only become more difficult to get these needed circuits.

The solution? Re-designing their way around the problem, he said, and in other cases looking outside of the country for needed supplies.

“It’s a matter on an individual basis of making do with the best you can, and doing a lot of searching on a worldwide basis. Thank goodness they invented the internet,” he joked. ■

Helping hand

continued from page 3

including Northern Virginia Food Rescue, the Loudoun Chapter of Moms Demand Action, Grace Covenant Church, the Loudoun League of Women Voters, the Fairfax County Policy Department Victim Services Division, the Ashburn Home Depot, the Sterling Office Depot, F22 Video Solutions, TPM Group and The SVE Firm.

Their support also will go into establishing the Guilford Elementary Pantry, which will be available to all of the students.

“This is more of a privilege for us to serve people,” Green said. “We could all be sick and in the hospital. We could all be with the people that the house burned down. We didn’t get to pick our parents, our nation, our nationality, our time, our

season, our year for living, and so all these kinds of things are a privilege.”

Green also said he hoped the event inspired other people to something to help the people around them—“make them sit on their sofas and think, ‘you know, I could have went over there today.’ You sure could have!”

He said in every community, there are people all around to help out—something as simple as mowing the lawn for a neighbor and keeping company a lonesome older person.

“[Moreland] comes from a very strong family, and he was raised very well,” said Joseph Seriki, who attended while Moreland was busy with a family matter. “So community has been something that’s always important to him.”

The effort to help those families continues. New Virginia Majority has established a GoFundMe page to collect monetary do-

nations for those impacted by the fire. The money will be distributed directly to families, including food, clothes, and rent money for their new homes.

Donations are at [gofundme.com/f/funds-for-chase-heritage-fire-survivors](https://www.gofundme.com/f/funds-for-chase-heritage-fire-survivors).

The county government also issued a call for help on Friday, asking property owners in the Sterling, Cascades, and Ashburn areas in need of tenants, or people aware of property owners searching for tenants, to contact the county. They can contact Christine Hillock, Community Development Specialist with the Office of Housing, with available housing options and suggestions, as well as for questions and more information by email at christine.hillock@loudoun.gov or phone at 703-771-5590.

“I’m hoping that the cynicism dies out and people come back to a place where just, really, human beings matter,” Green said. ■

Students

continued from page 3

for students,” Ziegler said. “When we say kids are not broken, this pandemic happened on a global scale. Every student in every school in every classroom worldwide missed that academic time.”

“We’re not going to treat them like they’ve done something wrong or they’ve come to us broken for the next year,” he said. “We’re going to do our very best to make sure that learning is exciting, that school is welcoming, safe and affirming for every student, and then we’re going to meet those needs academically and were going to provide the social and emotional support students need as well.”

“When we say students are not broken, that is a mindset for educators to take into account as we move into the next year.” ■

LoudounNow

VOL. 6, NO. 29

We've got you covered. In the mail weekly. Online always at LoudounNow.com

JUNE 17, 2021

School's Out:

Students Mark End of Unprecedented Year

LOUDOUN NOW STAFF REPORT

Tuesday marked the final day of classes for Loudoun's public school students, bringing to a close an unforgettable year.

The year started last fall with all students logging into their classes from home as the COVID-19 pandemic spurred a continuation of distance learning. Over the ensuing months, they transitioned to part-time, in-person classes before most students moved to four days of in-school instruction early this year.

Parents also had to adapt. Across the county, they built study areas in their homes, enlisted extra help to watch students learning from home, and were constantly prepared for plans to change.

Emily Kuehl, whose son goes to Rosa Lee Carter Elementary School, was thrilled that her family made it through the school year.

"I work full time, so I had to put my child in a daycare and home the teachers were on top of the work," she said. "I think the teachers handled it the best that they could."

Another parent, Patti Keehn, agreed that teachers handled the year well. Her children attend Cedar Lane Elementary School and Trailside Middle School.

"The teachers made all the difference, emphasizing the joy of learning and allowing for flexibility on the hard days,"



Renss Greene/Loudoun Now

At Catoctin Elementary School on Tuesday afternoon, underclassmen lined up outside the school to send off the fifth graders on their way to middle school with applause, music and cheering. On the way home, many students rushed to hug their favorite teachers in the bus loop before getting on the bus for the last time this summer, and the teachers all waved goodbye as the buses pulled away. Then, they turned to each other and several exclaimed: "We did it!"

she said.

Keehn said that, while her kids will miss seeing classmates on schooldays, she's relieved they're on summer break. The possible technical difficulties of dis-

tance learning made the family's day-to-day schedule unpredictable.

Students are out of class until Aug. 26, when the 2021-2022 school year begins. ■

Long Road Ahead

Loudoun's Travel Industry Begins Recovery

BY KARA C. RODRIGUEZ
krodriguez@loudounnow.com

When Gov. Ralph Northam announced he was lifting social distancing requirements put in place at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, The National Conference Center wasted no time in announcing to the world that it was ready to again welcome large groups to its Lansdowne facility, known for playing host to large conferences in the learning and development communities.

"The doors are open," Chuck Ocheltree, The National's chief marketing officer, said. "In fact, this week and next week we are enjoying a very nice occupancy level, about 400 people here in two different educational programs."

Ocheltree and others in the hospitality industry are bullish on the recovery potential of the region, but warn that it will likely be a slow one.

"While we are looking at the lifting of restrictions and it may feel like the end of a prolonged economic event, it's really just the beginning of our industry's recovery," said Beth Erickson, CEO of Visit Loudoun, the county's tourism authority. "We've got a long way to get back to where we were in 2019."

Initial indications are promising, however.

Erickson reported that hotel occupancy

LOUDOUN TRAVEL continues on page 31

Postal Customer
ECRWSS





HARTLEY
HOME EXTERIORS
ROOFING • WINDOWS • SIDING

540-441-7649
HartleyHomeExteriors.com

Girl Scout cookies are sold door to door...
not the roof on your house.

Trust a **LOCAL** Roofing Professional,
not someone that knocks on your door.



The Best Choice for Roofing Replacement

Loudoun travel

continued from page 1

in April, prior to restrictions being lifted, was just under 50% countywide. While that's a far cry from Loudoun's pre-pandemic norm hovering around 80%, it's the highest occupancy rate since COVID-19 took hold last March, she said. Loudoun continues to outperform the rest of the Northern Virginia region in terms of hotel occupancy, Erickson added. In terms of forecasts, hotels in the county are still expected to lose around \$72 million in revenue this year, but that's down almost 30% from last year's \$100 million lost revenue sucker punch.

Business travel is a key indicator for Visit Loudoun, and Erickson and others are looking to the sky for signs of recovery. Dulles Airport, a major hub of East Coast business travel as well as international travel, is again beginning to show activity reminiscent of prior to the pandemic. Michah Lillard, public information officer for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, reported that between April 1 and June 1, the number of passengers screened by the Transportation Safety Administration at Dulles increased by almost 700% over the same period in 2020. Additionally, the airport hit a COVID-era high for passengers screened at its TSA checkpoints on Friday, May 28, the start of the Memorial Day holiday weekend, with 17,834.

Lillard said he expects to see those records increase as the busy summer travel

season begins.

"While we remain well below pre-COVID numbers as far as passengers flying through Dulles International Airport, we are encouraged by the gradual uptick in travel, which is led in large part by leisure passengers —people flying to visit friends and relatives—especially as we get full-swing into the busy summer travel period," he added.

Erickson said the busier Dulles is, the better the indications are for the industry as a whole.

"When you start to see those numbers coming up consistently, you're going to know we're really in a full-blown recovery," Erickson said.

Leisure travel within Loudoun has not been nearly as affected as business travel, Erickson said. She noted Loudoun's reputation as "an incredible drive destination," accessible within a few hours' car ride from several states. Sports tournaments have been another bright spot, she said, while acknowledging, "they don't fill hotel rooms Monday through Thursday," a gap the county looks to business travelers to close.

Attracting business travelers and driving demand for Loudoun as a group destination is going to be a major charge for Visit Loudoun moving forward, Erickson said.

"That's going to move the needle for recovery," she said.

Ocheltree believes some organizations will completely re-engineer the way they conduct employee training, the bread-and-butter niche for The National. He foresees "hybrid" training becoming the norm—of-

fering in-person training and options for some employees to view the training at a satellite location, in a smaller group setting. But Ocheltree said he does not believe in-person training or meetings, even in large groups, will go away altogether.

"Some things just can't happen online. Some things have to happen in person. This one program that's here now is teachers. I think they just feel being in person and having workshops and breakout sessions, all those things that happen and are unstructured formally create value. People recognize that," he said.

Ocheltree said there is not one part of his organization that has not changed since the pandemic arrived. The National is not immune to staffing shortages plaguing the hospitality industry globally, and Ocheltree said that has caused them to look at compensation and cross-training. Some safety enhancements put in place during the pandemic are not likely to go away, as the general public slowly gets more comfortable with meetings and in-person events.

"Everything from the way we do house-keeping to the way we serve food to the way we take care of the chairs, tables, A/V equipment, all of the touch points are being addressed differently. The way people move throughout the conference center is just different. There's much more sensitivity to traffic patterns, large gatherings, bottlenecks. We still do buffet-style [meals] but everything is pre-wrapped including silverware. Those types of changes I think are here to stay," he said.

As different parts of the country are

handling COVID restrictions and embracing recovery differently, Ocheltree said The National is not yet seeing the floodgates open in terms of activity. But he foresees a potential supply and demand problem for 2022.

"What we see happening is people are going to realize [they're] not the only one waiting. If everyone waits for 2022 supply and demand, it's going to cause prices to go way up and cause space to be very limited for 2022," he said.

The National has space on its side, however, with Ocheltree noting that a recent conference was able to offer attendees 29 breakout rooms, something most traditional hotels cannot accommodate.

Ocheltree and others point to the faster recovery of the leisure travel market, as the population emerges from a prolonged case of cabin fever.

Other statistics back up that assessment. Erickson reports that traffic on Visit Loudoun's website is up 18% from the pre-COVID year of 2019. Destination Analysts, which has been tracking and measuring traveler sentiment since the beginning of the pandemic, also reported that 80% of Americans now indicate a desire to travel. With summer leisure travel expected to be strong, Erickson also expressed excitement about a certain facet of Destination Analysts' findings.

"Travelers are particularly interested in visiting small towns and rural destinations. That is Loudoun County, that is our sweet spot. That's why I think we're going to continue to see recovery," she said. ■

Juneteenth

continued from page 3

arrival of U.S. Colored Troops in Galveston, TX, on June 19, 1865, when thousands of African Americans in that city learned about the Emancipation Proclamation, signed more than two years earlier.

"Juneteenth is the realization of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th amendment. When they saw those Black troops show up in Galveston, that's what caused the celebration," said Steve Williams, president of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation and a Sterling resident.

But Juneteenth actually celebrates a series of events, from 1862 well into the 20th century, Williams said. And that history is part of the organization's Juneteenth 101 educational programming. NJOF was launched in 1994 and has been pushing for nearly three decades to get the holiday recognized at the state and national level. Juneteenth is now recognized as a holiday

Juneteenth in Loudoun

LOUDOUN FREEDOM CENTER'S JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION kicks off Saturday, June 19 at 9:30 a.m. at the Loudoun County Courthouse, and participants will walk to the Orion Anderson Lynching Memorial at the corner of Harrison St. and the W&OD Trail for a ceremony and reception from 10 to 11:45 a.m. For more information, go to facebook.com/loudounfreedomfoundation.

THE BURG FAMILY REUNION JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION takes place Saturday, June 19 from noon to 6 p.m. at Ida Lee Park. For more information, go to thebfc.com/juneteenth-celebration.

JUNETEENTH LOUDOUN takes place Saturday, June 19 from noon to 7 p.m. at Claude Moore Park and kicks off at 11 a.m. with a car caravan from Belmont Country Club. For more information, go to juneteenthloudoun.org. For information on the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation, including its Juneteenth 101 crash course on the holiday, go to njof.org.

or observance in more than 40 states, and the organization continues to push the US Congress for recognition as a federal holiday.

As president of the national foundation, Williams has been heavily involved with huge celebrations in D.C. and around the country for years. This year, it was time to organize an observance in his own back-

yard.

"I've done a lot of legwork [for NJOF], but I really ignored home," Williams said. "In Virginia really we didn't have a big footprint. ... This year I decided I have to do something at home."

Williams put together a local Juneteenth committee under the auspices of NJOF to create a Loudoun-based event

designed with both celebration and education in mind. Juneteenth Loudoun takes place Saturday, June 19 at Claude Moore Park in Sterling. The event starts at 11 a.m. with a prayer at Belmont Country Club followed by a car caravan to Claude Moore Park, where the celebration takes place from noon to 7 p.m. The afternoon includes a flag-raising by Buffalo Soldiers, poetry, speakers and music throughout the day, including gospel from Rev. Isaac Howard and the Howard Harmonizers, blues from Johnny Rawls and jazz and funk from Funkativity. The event also includes educational programming and other activities for kids.

The organizers of the three Loudoun events are in contact, and Williams said he's hopeful they can join forces in the future. But for now, raising awareness in separate events will work.

"None are free until all are free—that's the point we want to get to everybody," Williams said. "The national impact of Juneteenth is undeniable, and we have to acknowledge that." ■