

Restaurants hope Beloit outdoor dining continues to grow

By **BRAD ALLEN** Associated Press | **AUGUST 1, 2020 — 12:05AM**

BELOIT, Wis. — Residents hitting the town for drinks and food had a new outdoor experience over the weekend in downtown Beloit.

Tamsie Lamoreaux, general manager of the downtown restaurant truk't, said her staff could not have been more excited about the new dining arrangements.

"It's exciting to be able to extend our dining room space, to be able to have a fun experience in downtown Beloit," Lamoreaux told the Beloit Daily News.

Downtown Beloit Al Fresco on Grand began Friday night, July 24, allowing local businesses to serve customers outdoors while the road was closed to traffic. The event takes place each Friday and Saturday from 4–9 p.m., and it runs through Oct. 31.

During opening weekend, truk't, Lucy's #7 Burger Bar and Walnut Creek Apparel & Gifts participated. Downtown Beloit Association assisted.

Under city requirements for health safety due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants are limited to a fraction of their capacity when welcoming customers inside their establishments.

Opening up additional seating options in the street means more customers from the Staseline Area, giving local businesses a fighting chance, said Jeff Whiteman, Chief Operating Officer of Geronimo Hospitality Group, which owns truk't and Lucy's.

Whiteman said he has seen outdoor dining models work well in other cities nationwide, as businesses are adhering to social distancing and other health guidelines due to COVID-19.

Whiteman said truk't added about 32 more seats outside on Friday, and Lucy's had an extra 24 seats outdoors.

Both businesses also were fully staffed that weekend. Servers and cooks wore face coverings and had additional hand sanitizers available to use, along with single-use paper menus to reduce the possible spread of illness.

With the Beloit Farmer's Market also in full swing each weekend, Whiteman said the downtown area is an attractive place for community members to be.

Dennis Fenrick, Area Director of Operations for Geronimo, said he was glad to see community members come out and hopes more people stop by in the coming weeks.

Fenrick said he also hopes other downtown businesses will join in the event as it grows each week.

Nikkie Chadwick, owner of Walnut Creek, was working outside alongside employee Jen Hart on that Friday night.

To help promote the outdoor business experience, they are selling T-shirts encouraging people to shop local. Chadwick said the added customer exposure is crucial to local businesses and offers people a chance to get out and about safely.

Chadwick said she hopes the weather stays nice on upcoming weekends and that community members start to trickle in downtown in larger numbers as people hear about the events.

Beloit resident Jose Najera and his daughter, Giuliana, stopped by Lucy's #7 Burger Bar on Friday night for burgers.

Jose said he had heard about the outdoor dining through his employer, Fairbanks Morse, which he said is very community-minded and always lets its workers know about local events.

Eating outside was a fun outing, he said, and he felt the staff did a great job of focusing on customer safety.

"It allows people to come outside and have a good time, but also not to worry about getting sick," Jose said. "It's a good compromise."

Kelly Delafuente of Beloit went to truk't on Friday night with a couple of friends and her daughter, Marie, who was visiting from Colorado.

The group went out on a whim and was pleasantly surprised to see the new option of outdoor dining, Kelly said, adding it provided an open atmosphere to enjoy the summer weather over a meal.

She felt comfortable with the added health safety measures and said there was plenty of space and social distance between groups.
