

Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

30TH ANNIVERSARY

Appetizers

30 years serving the foodservice industry



Sunshine Plate Competition Stage debuts



TR Featured Restaurant City Austin, TX



Entrées

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A 5-step framework to prevent workplace violence in your restaurant

By Patrick Ryder

Service occupations — including food preparation and serving — account for nearly half of all nonfatal workplace injuries caused by intentional acts of violence against another person, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While no industry is fully immune to workplace violence, the exposure is compounded for restaurants by a unique set of risk factors: cash on hand, alcohol service, late-night hours and high customer volume.

The good news is that restaurants already have a blueprint to address it. Workplace violence prevention follows the same hazard-identification, risk-control and training framework operators already use every day for things like food safety, slips and burns. Taking a proactive approach can help identify risks early, prevent incidents and foster a culture of safety.

Why restaurants face elevated risk

The way most restaurants operate naturally create environments where tensions can escalate and incidents are more likely to occur.

Lean staffing and high turnover



Violence can arise between employees, sometimes fueled by stress or interpersonal conflict that builds over time.

are among the biggest factors that elevate risk. The industry's notoriously fast churn means there's almost always someone new on the floor — someone who hasn't been trained on the warning signs of escalating behavior, de-escalation tactics or reporting protocols.

When people think about workplace violence in restaurants, they likely picture a customer altercation. **But the threat can come from multiple directions.** Violence can arise between employees, sometimes fueled by stress or interpersonal conflict that builds over time. In many cases, domestic situations follow people to work, or online threats materialize in person without warning.

True story: After an employee at a small pizza restaurant posted threatening content online directed at a local school, a coworker saw it, followed the restaurant's reporting protocol and alerted management. Law enforcement investigated, confirmed the threat was credible and intervened before any harm occurred.

This real-world outcome was the result of a culture where employees knew what to look for and felt empowered to speak up. A 'see something, say

See **WORKPLACE** page 12

AMP Up1 Hospitality announces The Looking Glass at The CTR in downtown Atlanta

The team behind Your 3rd Spot will debut a large format immersive social destination that transforms the former CNN Studios into a world of story, play, food, beverage, events, and discovery.

AMP Up1 Hospitality, the Atlanta hospitality group behind the award winning Your 3rd Spot, has announced The Looking Glass, a new immersive social destination coming to The CTR ("The Center"), the reimaged former CNN Center in downtown Atlanta. Construction is expected to begin after the 2026 FIFA World Cup, with an anticipated opening in the second quarter of 2027.

Set within the former CNN Studios overlooking Centennial Olympic Park, The Looking Glass will transform one of Atlanta's most recognizable spaces into a multilevel destination for interactive play, culinary exploration, private events, and social gathering. The first location is being designed for more than 1,000 guests and is expected to create approximately 200 jobs in downtown Atlanta.



Created by a team with decades of experience opening, operating, and scaling hospitality and entertainment brands, The Looking Glass is AMP Up1 Hospitality's most ambitious concept to date. The venue builds on the company's work with Your 3rd Spot while introducing a distinct world of its own, shaped by premium design, thoughtful service, strong food and beverage, flexible event use, and a carefully considered guest journey.

"The Looking Glass is the kind of

project our team has spent decades preparing to build," said Josh Rossmeisl, Founder and Chief Vision Officer of AMP Up1 Hospitality. "It brings together story, hospitality, play, food, beverage, sound, light, and discovery inside one of Atlanta's most recognizable spaces. We are building a place that gives people a reason to be present with each other and a reason to come back with someone new."

Rooted in an immersive modern storyline, The Looking Glass invites

guests to move through a living world of games, illusion, sound, light, food, drink, and hidden discovery, with curiosity serving as the throughline of the experience.

Guests will receive a Curiosity Card, designed to support access and discovery throughout the visit. Experiences will include elevated carnival style games, immersive art inside The Hall of Illusions, challenge-based attractions, nine pin bowling inspired by traditional European play, and custom tabletop games developed specifically for the brand. AMP Up1 has also assembled a carefully selected group of global creative partners with deep experience in immersive entertainment, themed environments, interactive design, and sensory storytelling. These partners are already helping translate The Looking Glass vision into the visual, sensory, and interactive moments that will define the guest journey.

"What excites me most is the range of experiences we are curating

See **HOSPITALITY** page 14



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Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

In July 2026, Today's Restaurant celebrates a milestone that few industry publications ever reach — 30 years of continuous publishing. Since 1996, the publication has served as a trusted voice for the foodservice community, connecting restaurant operators, suppliers, manufacturers, and service professionals across the country. What began as a regional print newspaper has grown into a national digital platform built on relationships, reliability, and a commitment to helping the industry grow.

A steady voice through every challenge

Over the past three decades, the restaurant industry has faced some of the most turbulent periods in modern history. Through every challenge, Today's Restaurant continued to publish, continued to support suppliers, and continued to keep the industry informed.

The early 2000s brought the dot-com recession, followed by the tragic events of September 11, which reshaped the economy and the hospitality landscape. In 2008, the Great Recession forced thousands of restaurants to close and suppliers to rethink their strategies. Yet the publication remained a consistent source of news, advertising, and connection.

The most defining challenge came with the COVID-19 pandemic, which delivered the single greatest disruption the restaurant industry has ever experienced. While dining rooms closed and supply chains collapsed, Today's Restaurant stayed active, delivering updates, opportunities, and visibility to businesses fighting to survive. Even during the darkest months, the publication never missed an issue — a testament to its mission and its resilience.

Built on Relationships

From the beginning, Today's Restaurant has focused on the people behind the industry — the owners, chefs, reps, distributors, and innovators who keep foodservice moving. The publication's strength has always



July will feature exclusive anniversary opportunities designed to help suppliers increase visibility and generate new business...

come from relationships and the belief that the industry grows when the industry connects.

Through supplier advertising, industry news, and targeted outreach tools, the publication has helped thousands of businesses reach active buyers and build long-term partnerships.

Evolving with the industry

As the restaurant world changed, Today's Restaurant evolved with it. Over the years, the publication expanded into:

- ◆ National digital editions
- ◆ Targeted email and video e-blasts
- ◆ Restaurant Leads Reports
- ◆ Supplier showcases and special editions
- ◆ The Today's Restaurant Networking Group

See APPELL page 10

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PUBLISHER Howard Appell
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Important new products, corporate news and industry events

Closed or closing restaurants & chains nationwide

Taqueria Cancun, located at 2227 Gessner Rd in Houston, is now closed. The longtime Spring Branch Mexican diner has been serving the community since around 1986.

Papa John's is closing 300 U.S. restaurants by the end of 2027, with 200 closures already scheduled for 2026 and the remaining 100 in 2027.

For more than 30 years, **Noodles & Company has operated in multiple locations. The company has announced it will be closing up to 35 locations in 2026.** With over 400 total restaurants, that will be a large decline.

Starbucks has already closed roughly 500 locations across North America and is planning on closing hundreds more in 2026. This effort is part of a broader restructuring initiative known as "Back to Starbucks," which seems to focus on efficiency and consistency across stores.

Del Taco - All 11 Georgia locations closed after the bankruptcy of Matador Restaurant Group. There is no indication or news of any re-opening.

Caloosahatchee Cannabis Co. has closed Seed & Bean, a hemp cafe at 1520 Broadway in Ft Myers. The company will turn their attention to its expanded



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Cape Coral location and growing beverage business. Seed & Bean other spots in Venice and Cape Coral will remain open. They are now expanding their hemp beer and THC seltzer offerings.

The Neighborhood Restaurant Partners Florida, an Atlanta-based Applebee's franchisee, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy at the end of March for the 53 locations they operate across Florida, GA and Alabama.

Tampa Bay Brewing Company which was located at 1600 E 8th Ave in Ybor City, served its last beer at the end of last May. That location had been around about 30 years.

Motorworks Brewing has closed at 131 N Orange Avenue in Orlando. The location which opened in 2020 housed a seven-barrel brew-house with a full kitchen.

Savannah based Tequila's Town, has closed at 13475 Atlantic Blvd in Jacksonville. They operated there for seven years. There are five locations in Georgia, which all remain operating.

Wavelength Coffee Roasters has struck a vendor agreement with Revival Cafe and Kitchen. The Shirley, Massachusetts -based specialty roaster will supply Revival's six greater Boston locations with its Hacienda La Minita from Costa Rica—featured as part of Revival's classic coffee campaign. The La Minita comes from a 1,200-acre estate in Costa Rica's Tarrazú valley, one of the world's most celebrated coffee-growing regions. The estate is hands-on at every stage—hand-tended, hand-picked, hand-sorted. Only fully ripened cherries make the cut. The cup reflects it: smooth and full-bodied, with notes of baking chocolate, red plum, and sweet citrus. Coffee Review gave it 94 points. It's Rainforest Alliance Certified. "Revival Cafe has built something special—a place where people genuinely care about quality, from the food to the cup," said Jim Varney, co-founder of Wavelength



A new-to-Kentucky restaurant chain has opened its first Lexington location with plans to open two more. The operators of a Nothing But Noodles franchise opened on Harrodsburg Road. It is close to [the newly opened Graeter's Ice Cream](#). General Manager there is Kevin Burnett. The restaurant has locations in Alabama and NC.

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 11

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Complaints are opportunities Make the most of them

John Tschohl ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

Almost nothing strikes more fear in an employee's heart than a customer with a complaint. Most employees would rather have a tooth pulled without novocaine than deal with customers who aren't pleased with a product or service they purchased from your company.

Your first thought might be, "Where can I hide?" Face it: you can't. What you can—and should do—is address the situation and, in

the process, retain those customers and the money they spend with you.

The first step is realizing that any complaint from a customer—or a coworker, for that matter—is an opportunity to learn and to grow. Many customers simply take their business elsewhere. Those who come to you with a complaint are giving you an opportunity to solve their problems and to identify what changes in your company's

products or services might need to be made.


What are the barriers that prevent you from satisfying customers? Most barriers involve policy procedures and policies that prevent employees from offering practical solutions and doing so in a timely manner. Identify those barriers and then eliminate them.

Office of Consumer Affairs found that 95 percent of customers who register complaints will do business with you again if they feel their complaints were resolved quickly.

Make it easy for your customers to complain. When they do, they're actually working as your consultants. They're pointing out flaws in your products or services. If you have to compensate them for doing so, that's money well spent. Inside the reasons for most complaints is the knowledge you need to prevent them. Keep track of customer complaints so you can identify what changes the company must make to reduce or eliminate them.

Customer complaints fall into several categories, including poor customer service and low-quality goods or services. It's up to you to make their situations right. That means you must listen to their complaints, ask questions, get all the facts, apologize, offer options for solving their problems, and ask what they would like you to do for them. Don't get defensive or confrontational. Do whatever you can to satisfy your customers and retain their business. Practice service recovery and be relentless in making certain your customers are satisfied with your products and services.

Just as word-of-mouth advertising can attract customers when they tell their family and friends about your wonderful company, word-of-mouth complaining can discourage new customers from doing business with you. Studies have shown that a customer who has a complaint that is resolved to their satisfaction are more loyal to you than customers who have never voiced a complaint.

I leave you with this: Customer service — including the resolution of complaints — is less expensive than customer replacement. 

About John Tschohl: For more information on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, visit www.customer-service.com.

*"For every \$1
spent in courtesy
adjustments, we
receive \$5 in
business."*

Are you empowered to make decisions on the spot, or are you required to send the problem up the ladder to a manager? If that's the case, you're in trouble. Many managers don't empower employees to make decisions, because they don't trust them—and they don't trust their customers. They think customers will take advantage of employees and that employees will give away the store.

When a customer comes to you with a complaint, you have cost them money by wasting their time. Make it right; pay them for their inconvenience. When you compensate them with credit for a free product or service, they'll come back to you to spend it. By compensating them, you've bought yourself a second chance. Most customers don't complain; they just stop doing business with you.

Bemiss Rolfs, former president of National Car Rental had this to say about the value of positive resolution: "For every \$1 spent in courtesy adjustments, we receive \$5 in business." A study for the U.S.

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Little Greek expands Florida presence

Tampa, FL- [Little Greek Fresh Grill](#), the Mediterranean brand serving bold, cooked-to-order dishes with an American twist, is expanding its footprint in Florida having recently signed a deal with an area representative for the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale areas. The franchise partner will develop up to 30 locations in the markets over the next 10 years. The fast-casual Florida favorite is gearing up for a busy year of growth as they also just re-opened their location at Tropicana field and are eyeing additional expansion in the state.

Little Greek Fresh Grill which is headquartered in Tampa currently has 35 locations throughout Florida. The brand has strong name recognition with over 20 years in the state and has built a dedicated following since opening its first location. Looking to expand further, the brand is actively targeting 100 locations throughout the state.

“We know that because of the care and quality we put into every menu item, Little Greek will thrive in the Long Island area, backed by strong support from our home office team as we continue delivering fresh, high-quality food to the community,”

“We’re confident Little Greek will be a strong fit for the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale community because guests in Florida already love fresh, high-quality food served with genuine hospitality,” said Bryan St. George, COO and VP of Operations at Little Greek. “Combined with the support and operational experience of our home office team, we believe the brand is well-positioned for long-term success in the market.”

Little Greek recently celebrated the re-opening of its location at Tropicana Field on April 6, following a full rebuild after the venue sustained significant

See **LITTLE GREEK** page 12

Industry Spotlight

The Restaurant Store



(L-R) Alberto Flores from AOTA Solutions
Gerry Mangual (Host), The Restaurant Store
Stefanie and Mark Brilliant from Brilliant Computers
Howard Appell Publisher, CEO Today's Restaurant
Terri McKinney Appell Editor, Today's Restaurant
Terry Arke of Creative Business Impressions; Sven Jensen from Pro-Tier
and Steve Whitehill of Anchor Business Brokers

Local South Florida members of the Today's Restaurant Networking Groups recently had the opportunity to tour the impressive new 50,000 sq. ft. showroom and warehouse of The Restaurant Store, located at 2750 Bridge Way, Unit 120, Davie, Florida, 33314.

While our networking sessions are typically held on Zoom to include members from across the country, this event marked a milestone—our

first hybrid meeting, with both in-person attendees and Zoom participants joining together.

You can catch the full experience on the Today's Restaurant YouTube channel on the internet at : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8Xj11-qjHSX9xxAEZEHqOO>

When you visit The Restaurant Store, be sure to ask for Gerry Mangual — he'll be happy to show you around. **TR**

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Sunshine Plate Competition Stage to debut at the 2026 Florida Restaurant Show in Orlando

Delivering a concentrated audience of engaged culinary professionals through high-impact, live competition programming

Orlando, FL—The Florida Restaurant Show is turning up the heat with the debut of the Sunshine Plate Competition Stage, sponsored by UNOX Combi Ovens. This all-new, high-energy culinary experience is set to take center stage at the 2026 event, taking place October 25–27 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

Presented in partnership with the American Culinary Federation Central Florida Chapter, the Sunshine Plate Competition Stage will take place over three action-packed days, featuring head-to-head chef battles.

As the official arena for the 2026 ACF Culinary Arts Competition, this can't miss feature celebrates the passion and talent of the profession. Attendees can expect a lively atmosphere filled with bold flavors, creative presentations, and interactive moments that bring them closer to the interactive moments that bring them closer to the action.

Designed to deliver both competition and entertainment, the stage will feature four fully equipped cooking stations where chefs will go head-to-head in live culinary battles. With stadium-style seating and surrounding bleachers, attendees will enjoy an immersive, front-row experience as the action unfolds in a dynamic and engaging setting.

The ability to watch culinary



techniques in real time, discover new ingredient applications, and gain inspiration elevates the attendee experience to a new level.

“Our goal with the Sunshine Plate Competition Stage is to create an unforgettable experience that blends culinary excellence with live entertainment,”

said Glenn Celentano, Partner and CEO of Restaurant Events. “By partnering with the ACF Central Florida Chapter, we are elevating the level of competition and providing chefs with a prestigious platform to showcase their skills, while reinforcing the Florida Restaurant Show’s commitment to professional excellence, innovation and meaningful industry connections. This new feature is poised to become a centerpiece attraction for the 2026 event.”


UNOX will be the official combi oven sponsor for the competition stage. For sponsors and exhibitors, the competition provides a powerful platform for product storytelling, brand visibility and authentic engagement with decision-makers – placing products directly into the hands of chefs and into the spotlight of live competition. For more information on ways to get involved, contact Paul Pedrow, VP of Sales, at paul@therestaurantevents.com.

The Sunshine Plate Competition Stage will highlight a range of disciplines across both student and professional levels, including:

- ◆ Pastry Sculpture Competitions (Student and Professional) – Sunday, October 25
- ◆ Pork Challenge (Professional Hot Food Competition) – Sunday, October 25

- ◆ Seafood Challenge (Professional Hot Food Competition) – Monday, October 26
- ◆ Beef Challenge (Professional Hot Food Competition) – Tuesday, October 27

Competitors will be judged by a panel of esteemed culinary professionals, led by Reimund Pitz, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF, with additional judges to be announced. Participants will compete for ACF Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals based on scoring, along with event trophies and cash prizes awarded to the top three finishers in each category. Open to both ACF members and non-members, the competition invites chefs and culinary students to demonstrate their creativity, precision, and technical expertise.

In addition to the ACF competitions, chefs from across the region will participate in timed challenges judged by industry experts and celebrated culinary professionals. The 2026 Florida Restaurant Show will bring together thousands of restaurant and foodservice professionals for three days of networking, education, and discovery of the latest trends, products, and solutions shaping the industry. For more information and updates, visit the show website online at www.floridarestaurantshow.com. 

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Featured City Austin

◆ **Proud Mary Coffee**, a coffee brand based in Australia, is opening a second location in Austin at 4301 Guadalupe St Ste 100. The new location will open in the Fall of 2026. There are two others both located in Oregon.



◆ Justin Timberlake is once again joining forces with restaurateur



◆ **Sam Fox** to bring their celebrated Nashville hotspot, [The Twelve Thirty Club](#), to Austin. The new location is set to open in late 2027. Much like the Nashville club, the Austin version will unfold across four distinct levels, each designed as its own immersive experience — from the vibrant, music-filled Supper Club and hidden Speakeasy to the exclusive Honorary Member lounge and private event space above. Guests can expect live performances, hand-crafted cocktails, and new menu items inspired by Austin’s culinary and cultural spirit.



◆ **The Butcher’s Daughter** will open this Fall at 1600 S. Congress Ave., in Austin. This is a fully vegetarian, all-day cafe which will offer vegan and gluten-free dishes. This is the 1st location in Texas location, joining sister spots in Los Angeles and New York City.



TRN FEATURED RESTAURANTS AUSTIN

Banger’s Sausage House

The restaurant was opened in 2012 by owner Ben Siegel and executive chef Ted Prater. Ben Siegel, a native Texan, is an entrepreneur with a love for good food and good beer. His restaurant is located in the [Rainey Street Historic District](#), in what was formerly old homes that were converted into businesses.

Offering 30 types of artisanal house made sausages, which include traditional varieties of sausage such as [bratwurst](#), [andouille](#), [hot dogs](#) and [currywurst](#). It also serves sausages made out of [game meat](#) such as duck and wild boar, and vegan mushroom sausages. They are well known for their whole hog barbecue.

The restaurant serves [craft beers](#), and has over 200 on Tap. Its decor is based on barns and stables. Taxidermied [boar](#) heads are mounted on the wall, and a 27-foot [butcher block](#) is used as the bar.



It has an indoor bar and dining area, and an outdoor [beer garden](#) with a [dog park](#) and a nice live music venue. The building, in a rustic red cottage setting offers seating inside or in a tree-shaded beer garden with picnic tables, strings of lights and so much more.

In 2018, the restaurant expanded into a 3-story building and added a

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RESTAURANT CITY AUSTIN

& Beer Garden in Austin



smokehouse, which is still in use. In 2020, they opened a [submarine sandwich](#) shop. They added the restaurants in the first few years to keep new concepts within.

“We are a culinary compound of sorts. We operate a smokehouse serving up a variety of BBQ and live fire dishes. We operate arguably the best sub shop in the city making all

of our meats right here in house.” “Outside of food and drink we have a dedication to live music and our own brand of Texas authenticity that has a heavy dose of Austin oddity mixed in with the traditional. On top of all that our hospitality is second to none.” “We are more than a restaurant, we are a destination and a full blown experience.” 



Big Al's Pizza is a new concept coming from the team that owns Hank's Austin. It will feature NY-style pizza and other menu items. Opening this Summer, Big Al's Pizza will be located at 5811 Berkman Drive Bldg. H. This is next door to Hank's in Windsor Park.

new location is at 3309 Esperanza Crossing, in Austin.

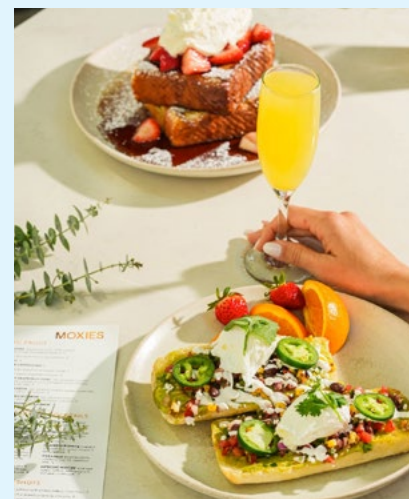


K Pot Korean BBQ & Hot Pot has just started construction and is expected to continue through 2026. The new location is expected to offer all-you-can-eat Korean barbecue and hot pot. It will be located at 13945 N. U.S. Hwy 183 in Austin.



Duff's Famous Wings opened a new location near Lakeline Mall in June. This is a franchised location. Duff's is known for its classic Buffalo-style wings, hot red sauce, celery sticks and blue cheese. It is located at 12233 N. RM 620 Ste 205 in Austin.

A new **Moxies** location is coming to the Domain, according to a TDLR filing. The restaurant, bar and lounge is set to break ground on the project in early July, **finishing up construction in May 2027**. Moxies' menu features crab cakes, bruschetta, steak, seafood and pasta. The





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The reality behind today's restaurant closures

Paul Segreto ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

Over the past few weeks, I learned about several more local restaurants closing their doors. At the same time, I came across reports of additional closures happening throughout the country; seemingly every week, another independent operator, another franchisee, another family-owned establishment quietly disappears.

After more than 40 years in franchising and the restaurant business, these stories affect me differently than they once did.

Perhaps it comes with experience. Perhaps it comes from having lived through economic cycles, operational challenges, labor shortages, changing consumer behavior, inflationary pressures, industry disruption, and the emotional highs and lows that come with entrepreneurship itself. Or perhaps it simply comes from understanding what most people never truly see behind the walls of a restaurant.

Because when a restaurant closes, it is rarely just about food.

It is about people.

It is about years of sacrifice. Long days. Sleepless nights. Missed family moments. Financial risk. Personal guarantees. Emotional investment. It is about owners who often carried the weight of dozens of employees and their families



on their shoulders while simultaneously trying to protect their own.

What many customers experience as a meal, a gathering place, or a convenient stop during their day, restaurant owners experience as responsibility.

Constant responsibility.

And for many operators today, that responsibility has become overwhelming.

I often find myself thinking about what happens during those final months leading up to a closure. The conversations owners have behind closed doors. The difficult decisions delayed as long as possible. The internal battles between pride, perseverance, exhaustion, and reality.

How many owners continued

smiling in front of guests while privately wondering how payroll would be met?

How many delayed paying themselves to protect employees?

How many refinanced homes, depleted savings, borrowed from retirement accounts, or sacrificed personal stability simply trying to buy more time?

And perhaps the most difficult question of all: At what point does resilience quietly become survival?

The restaurant industry has always been demanding, but the past several years have changed the emotional landscape of ownership entirely. For many, the struggle never truly ended after Covid. Operators adapted, pivoted, survived, rebuilt menus, changed labor models, embraced technology, renegotiated leases, adjusted hours, and found creative ways to move forward.

But survival comes at a cost.

And eventually, even the strongest operators begin asking themselves difficult questions.

How much more can I give?

How much more uncertainty can my family absorb?

Is continuing to fight still strategic... or simply emotional?

There is a misconception that restaurant owners simply "walk away" when a business closes. In my experience, that is almost never the case. Most owners fight far longer than they should. They hold on because they believe in the business, their employees, their customers, and the responsibility they feel to everyone connected to it.

Until eventually, time runs out. Or capital runs out. Or energy runs out. Or perhaps most quietly and painfully...

the fight itself runs out.

And honestly, after decades in this business, I can tell you this with certainty: That reality never becomes easier to witness.

What concerns me most today is not simply the number of closures. It is what these closures may be telling us about the broader state of entrepreneurship, small business ownership, franchising, commercial real estate, labor economics, and the emotional sustainability of ownership itself.

Are we reaching a point where too many operators are carrying too much alone?

Have we created an environment where independent operators and franchisees are expected to continuously absorb rising costs, operational complexity, staffing instability, and economic pressure without enough support?

And perhaps most importantly: How many owners are silently struggling right now while outwardly appearing "fine"?

These are not easy conversations, but they are necessary ones.

Because behind every closure is a story few people will ever fully understand.

A family affected. An entrepreneur exhausted. A dream interrupted. A chapter closed.

Let's talk about it

If you are an independent restaurant owner or franchisee currently facing challenges, please know that asking for perspective, guidance, or simply a confidential conversation is not weakness. In many cases, it may be the most important business decision you make.

Sometimes clarity comes not from having all the answers, but from finally having an honest conversation about the questions.

What are your real options? What can still be saved? What needs to change? What are you holding onto emotionally versus strategically? And what would a healthier path forward actually look like?

If you need someone to discuss next steps with, please feel free to reach out to me directly via direct message or by email at paul@acceler8success.com. All conversations and information will remain completely confidential.

Please don't hesitate.

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Appell from page 2

Each new offering reflects a commitment to staying relevant, useful, and ahead of industry needs.

30th Anniversary promotions

To celebrate this milestone, July will feature exclusive anniversary opportunities designed to help suppliers increase visibility and generate new business:

- ◆ Special pricing on digital ads
- ◆ Discounts on email and video e-blasts
- ◆ Anniversary packages for Restaurant Leads Reports
- ◆ Networking Group incentives

A Message of Gratitude

For 30 years, Today's Restaurant has been there for the industry making friends and enjoying the relationships we've made in good times, tough times, and historic times. The industry has changed and so have we. This anniversary honors the past and reaffirms a promise for the future: We will continue to publish. We will continue to support. We will continue to connect the industry.

Join the Celebration and send us your thoughts on what you would like to see Today's Restaurant tackle next. Most of all thank you for a great 30 years.

What's Going On from page 3

Coffee Roasters. "Hacienda La Minita rewards that kind of attention. It's one of the most meticulously grown coffees in the world, and we're proud to bring it to Revival's customers." Online at www.revivalcafeandkitchen.com.



Mas Restaurant Group, a franchisee of 123 Taco Bell restaurants in the Houston, TX and Columbus, OH metro areas, has announced that it has sold 44 of its Houston locations to Ghai Restaurant Group. MRG is backed by Bessemer Investors, LLC, a New York-based investment firm. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed. Bessemer partnered with MRG in 2018, alongside current CEO Chad Motsinger and CFO Ben Walsh, to support the company's next phase of growth. During Bessemer's investment, MRG advanced its organic growth plan while also pursuing strategic inorganic expansion, including the 2021 acquisition of CL Companies in Ohio, which

broadened the company's footprint and strengthened its platform.

◆◆◆◆◆
◆ Fiorenza Italian, a new Tuscan-inspired restaurant, will open in Alpharetta, GA this summer. Owned and operated by a Florence-raised restaurateur, Fiorenza offers authentic Italian cuisine. They also have 2,500 sq. ft. of event space for special occasions. Fiorenza is located at 11500 Webb Bridge Way. Fiorenza.com.



◆◆◆◆◆
◆ NyamTyme, an Orlando-built food membership platform, has launched in Florida to help diners eat out for less while giving local restaurants a lower-cost way to attract repeat customers. Founded by Jevoyan Dahaqua, a commercial pilot and longtime technology builder, and Courtney Dahaqua, a Florida native, NyamTyme connects customers with pre-paid restaurant memberships that can be used at participating local restaurants. The company is launching first in Central Florida and is currently inviting restaurants, cafés, and food businesses across Florida to join the platform. NyamTyme's mission is to make local



dining more accessible for everyday Floridians while helping restaurants grow without relying only on high-fee third-party delivery apps. Visit NyamTyme.com.

◆◆◆◆◆
 To satisfy foodservice operators looking to add affordable indulgence to their menus, **Rich Products is introducing three dessert portfolios that taste as exceptional as they look: 4" Mini Cakes in four classic flavors, 5" Double Layer Cakes in five options, and Our Specialty Treat Shop Whipped Dessert Dips in three flavors.** The convenient, ready-to-serve sweets arrive with optional labels and go from freezer to refrigerator or shelf, requiring no prep. The flavorful cakes and dessert dips will satisfy the myriad consumers seeking a sweet treat for festive gatherings at restaurants and eatertainment venues. According to the Datassential 2025 Casual Dining Segment Report, 29% of consumers report visiting casual dining establishments for celebrations or special occasions. Plus, 63% of foodservice operators offer cake on their menus (Technomic 2025 Bakery Report), which satisfies the 86% of consumers who love or like cake (SNAP! Datassential, 2025). "Consumers still want to enjoy moments of elevated indulgence, yet now they're looking for smaller portions and lower price points," says Alyssa

Barrett, Senior Customer Marketing Manager, Rich Products. "Rich's is making it easier for operators to delight their consumers. Our new compact cakes and dessert dips check all the boxes: they taste amazing and require minimal labor at a price point that operators and consumers will love."

◆◆◆◆◆
◆ Huckleberry's Breakfast & Lunch is expanding in Texas with two new restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth and one in Austin. Huckleberry's will soon be in the Texas communities of McKinney, Allen and North Austin. Additionally, Huckleberry's has signed their first unit in Cedar Park/Round Rock. Huckleberry's Breakfast & Lunch is a franchise owned by Heritage Restaurant Brands. With 35 locations in California, Nevada, Texas and Oregon - and more strategic expansion on the way. "Southern Cookin' with a California Twist!"®

◆◆◆◆◆
Today's Restaurant invites you to submit information for the What's Going On column at any time. Please e-mail your company or product info to terri@trnusa.com and try to keep the word count between 50-75 words. You can get free publicity for your company, product, service or event! Then check the rest of our website for more information, foodservice news, back issue PDFs, classified ads & more!



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- *No need for water connection*
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- *Air cooled*
- *Automatic night function*
- *Made of high quality food grade stainless steel*

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The cylinder can be refilled with fresh liquid mix as your product is sold. This machine's inverter adjusts the motor speed for a variable beating speed to better control the gelato consistency. Variable beating speeds allow the unit to produce special recipes like granita and frozen coffee cream.

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Workplace from page 1

something' approach only works if staff are trained to spot warning signs and report concerns.

A practical framework to prevent workplace violence

Effective workplace violence prevention doesn't require an elaborate corporate program. It follows the same logic operators apply to every other type of hazard. Here are five key steps to build a violence prevention program:

1. Get leadership on board

No program gains traction without visible commitment from the top. Ownership and senior management should know the risks and elevate violence prevention as a priority. That requires allocating time and resources, modeling the behavior and holding managers accountable for follow through.

2. Assess your specific risks

Every restaurant's risk profile is different. A late-night bar operation in a dense urban area faces different exposures than a family dining business in a suburban strip mall. Before building a program, map your specific vulnerabilities. Consider the following to ensure your prevention strategies reflect your actual environment:

- ◆ Do employees close alone?
- ◆ Do you handle large amounts of cash?
- ◆ Do you serve alcohol until 2 a.m.?
- ◆ Do you have a history of rowdy customers or staff conflict?

3. Build a written policy

A clear, written workplace violence prevention policy is the foundation. It should define what constitutes workplace violence (including verbal threats and intimidation, not just physical acts), establish a zero-tolerance standard, outline reporting procedures and specify consequences. Critically, it needs to protect employees who report concerns from retaliation, because no one will speak up if

they fear losing their job for doing so. Post it, train to it and revisit it regularly.

4. Train staff regularly

In a high-turnover industry, one-time onboarding isn't enough. Training should be ongoing and cover three core areas: recognizing early warning signs of escalating behavior (agitation, verbal threats, erratic conduct), de-escalation techniques for customer-facing situations and the reporting process. For kitchen and back-of-house staff, include protocols for employee-to-employee conflict. Training for front-of-house teams should address how to handle intoxicated or aggressive guests.

A general rule of thumb: Workplace violence training should be as routine as food safety certifications.

5. Establish a threat assessment and response process

When a concern is reported, establish a consistent process to evaluate it. Even a small restaurant can designate one or two people responsible for threat assessment and establish a clear protocol: document the concern, evaluate severity, determine a response and follow up. For smaller operations, this may involve a relationship with local law enforcement.

No operator is too small to start

Workplace violence prevention doesn't require a sophisticated program or dedicated HR team. A simple, consistently applied program — with clear policies, reporting mechanisms and employee training — will outperform an elaborate manual that only exists on paper. **TR**

About the author: Patrick Ryder, RPLU, CPCU, is Senior Vice President and management and professional liability segment leader for leading cannabis insurance brokerage Hub International. He has nearly 20 years of customer service and client development experience consulting with organizations across North and South America, Europe, Asia and Australia on program design and risk management techniques as they relate to their management, professional, cyber liability and transactional risk exposures.

Little Greek from page 5

damage during Hurricane Milton in 2024. The reopening marks a meaningful milestone for the brand, underscoring its resilience and commitment to reaching the community where they are.

Similarly, Little Greek is also dominating in their home market of Tampa, providing a variety of menu items at the Benchmark International Arena. The brand's growing presence at baseball, soccer, hockey, and concert events highlights Little Greek's momentum in Tampa and across the state. The franchise's ability to connect with customers through diverse live-event experiences and the way for future expansion in similar venues across the state.

Little Greek is proving you don't need a massive investment to make a big impact.

Since launching its franchise program in 2011, Little Greek has grown into a strong franchise system with a people-first approach that really sets them apart. With 50 locations open to date, the brand is all about passionate, hands-on partners who are deeply involved in their restaurants and their communities. In return, franchisees receive robust, end-to-end support from a seasoned leadership team with decades of experience in franchising and restaurant growth.

"Backed by over 20 years of experience and expertise, we understand the needs of both our franchisees and customers, which has allowed us to be a leader in the competitive QSR

space," said Nick Vojnovic, President of Little Greek. "Our customers are incredibly loyal because they know the flavor, freshness and value we deliver are hard to match, and they continue to reward us with repeat business."

What keeps guests coming back? It starts in the kitchen. Little Greek's menu is built around high-quality ingredients, scratch-made recipes and dishes cooked fresh to order. From hand-prepared meats to traditional favorites like dolmades that are crafted through a 17-step, two-and-a-half-hour process, the brand delivers authentic Mediterranean flavor with a modern approach.

Little Greek is proving you don't need a massive investment to make a big impact. With startup costs typically ranging from \$150,000 to \$350,000 the brand offers an accessible entry point into the fast-casual space though investment costs may vary by location, buildout requirements and other factors. With strong momentum, a proven model and a standout product, Little Greek is inviting the next generation of franchisees to join a brand that's equal parts flavorful and forward-thinking.

About Little Greek Fresh Grill Little Greek Fresh Grill is a fast-casual Mediterranean restaurant brand serving fresh, made-to-order dishes inspired by traditional recipes with a modern American twist. Since franchising in 2011, the brand has grown to 50 locations across Florida, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, and Texas, with approximately 80% operated by franchise partners. Known for its streamlined model, strong unit-level economics and low initial investment of \$150,000 to \$350,000, Little Greek offers an accessible and scalable franchise opportunity. Backed by a seasoned leadership team, the brand prioritizes owner-operators and provides hands-on support to drive long-term franchisee success and thoughtful growth. **TR**

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Hospitality

from page 1

for adults,” said Doug Warner, Co Founder and Chief Solutions Officer of AMP Up1 Hospitality. “We searched for activities that create different kinds of connection, from competitive play and hands on challenges to immersive spaces, hidden discoveries, and moments guests can simply wander into. The Looking Glass is being designed so the night can shift with the people you are with and the mood you are in.”


Ember Market will feature upscale share plates, a pastry and sweets program, cocktails, zero proof offerings, and other signature drinks.

Food and beverage are central to the concept. Tea Time reservations will offer a modern take on the classic ritual with savory and sweet offerings, celebratory drinks, and a social energy suited for date nights, birthdays, bachelor and bachelorette celebrations, and group gatherings. Ember Market will feature upscale share plates, a pastry and sweets program, cocktails, zero proof offerings, and other signature drinks. Planned menu highlights include Westside Lemon Pepper Shrimp,

Spicy Tuna Crispy Rice, Midnight Beignets, Brown Butter Tea Cake, and Raspberry Rose Macarons.

The Looking Glass will welcome people and groups during the day, with guests under 18 accompanied by a parent or guardian. In the evening, the venue will shift into a 21 and older environment for adults seeking an immersive, social, and memorable night out.

The Looking Glass is also being built as a major downtown Atlanta events destination, with flexible layouts, private gathering spaces, and a format designed around movement and discovery. The venue will be well suited for birthday parties, team outings, client entertainment, holiday celebrations, receptions, brand activations, and full venue corporate events. Its location next to the Georgia World Congress Center, near State Farm Arena and Centennial Olympic Park, and surrounded by thousands of nearby hotel rooms makes it especially attractive for convention business and large group gatherings.

The venue will open as part of the major transformation of The CTR, CP Group’s reimagining of the iconic former CNN Center into a mixed use destination for food, culture, work, entertainment, and community. Positioned at the intersection of Atlanta’s sports, convention, and entertainment districts, The CTR gives The Looking Glass a downtown platform with built in energy from locals, visitors, arena guests, convention attendees, and hotel traffic. 

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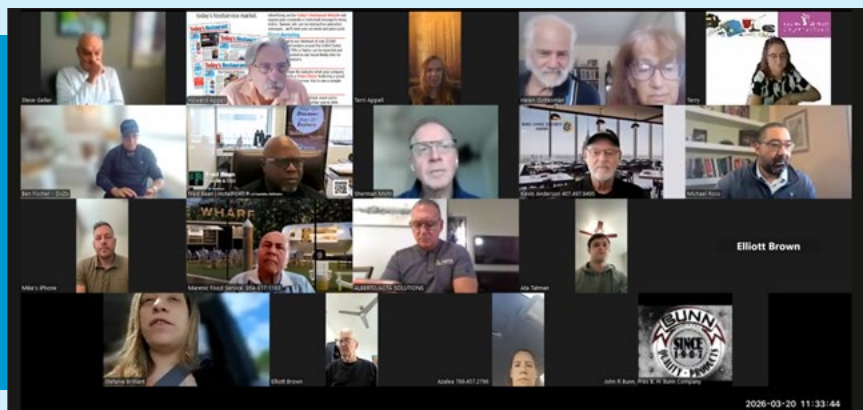
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CHAPTER 1 ♦ VIRTUAL MEETINGS ♦ FRIDAYS 11 AM

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