



#RallyforNHRestaurants: A way to help your favorite restaurants through the winter homestretch

🕒 Saturday, February 27, 2021 👤 Carol Robidoux 📧 Business, COVID-19 in NH: Latest news and updates, News, Restaurants and Dining, Sponsored Content 💬 0 Comments



Keri Laman, owner of Tidewater Catering Group in Manchester, says she is grateful for the strong support she has received through the NH Restaurant & Lodging Association. Photo/Carol Robidoux

MANCHESTER, NH – A year into the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), a disruptor that has permanently altered our sense of normalcy, local restaurant owners can't say enough about the power of their regulars to keep them going through what has been the darkest of times.

"At the beginning, there was such a sense of awkwardness in terms of not really knowing what was going to lie ahead. Everything came to a sudden stop," says Keri Laman, President of [Tidewater Catering Group](#) in Manchester.

"You spend an inordinate amount of time keeping staff calm, and keeping yourself calm," says Laman, an initial reaction that led to an abyss of uncertainty. When it became clear the disruption to her businesses, which includes Tidewater Catering plus three cafes in Manchester – Waterworks, Unity and Bayona – Laman understood she would be fighting for survival.

"There have been dark days, and it's been a fight. We don't just want to survive, we want to thrive – and even the thriving part is hard as you know in the restaurant business our profit margins are thin. If you're not an owner/operator you put yourself in the position of where you're leaving a lot to chance. For me," says Laman, "it took a good 60 days before I realized we needed to come up with a new approach."

Laman says every business relies on the steady patronage of its regulars. Her cafes, situated in historic mill buildings, were crippled when nearby businesses stopped going to the office.

"We relied on people coming to work every day and coming in four to five times a week for breakfast and lunch, or snacks, and sustaining a constant flow. Early on there were days where no one came in and all we had were phone orders," Laman said.

Although she is optimistic about the coming year, one of her cafes, Bayona, did not make the cut. Located in the Jefferson Mills it was surviving before the pandemic, but when surrounding businesses went remote, Laman realized it was unsustainable.

Another restaurant, [Ray Street Pizza](#), has taken over that space, but Laman says she hasn't given up on a Bayona revival.

"I have another concept in mind for another location and our hope is to repurpose what was inside there, which was a very New York cafe vibe," Laman says.

Beyond the support of customers, Laman says she could not have navigated the rigors of federal and state relief opportunities without the guidance of the [New Hampshire Lodging and Restaurant Association](#) (NHLRA.)

A two-month campaign that kicked off Feb. 1 called [Rally for NH Restaurants](#) is an initiative designed by NHLRA to inform consumers about the plight of the state's hospitality industry and inspire them to support their favorites in a variety of tangible ways.



Priscilla Lane-Rondeau owner of 900 Degrees Neopolitan Pizzeria in Manchester. Photo/Carol Robidoux

The campaign, sponsored in part by a [Joint Promotional Program grant](#) through the [New Hampshire Division of Travel & Tourism Development](#), comes as restaurants across the state are wrestling with the double blow of the pandemic and the typically slower winter months.

“This grassroots movement is exactly the support our devastated industry needs right now,” says NHLRA President and CEO Mike Somers. “We know consumers are looking for ways to help our restaurants and their employees. Through this movement, we can all come together to help the foodservice community stay afloat until spring.”



Tipped Extra	Dined in	Bought a gift card	Checked into a restaurant on Facebook	Grabbed coffee
Tried a new place for lunch	Ordered beer or wine with takeout	Posted a food selfie on social media	Booked a staycation	Purchased NH craft beer
Wore a mask when not eating or drinking	Made a reservation		Ordered takeout directly from the restaurant	Donated to the NH Hospitality Employee Relief Fund
Stayed at a NH hotel	Bought a restaurant's merchandise	Commented on a restaurant's social media post	Gave a gift card as a gift	Followed Rally for NH Restaurants on social media
Ordered takeout	Picked up breakfast to-go	Made a reservation	Thanked a server	Left a positive review

Send in your winning Bingo card to NH Flavors on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or via email to pbaker@nhlra.com to receive your gift cards.

The NHLRA says the first five people to send in a completed Bingo card will get a haul of gift cards. You can download your bingo card at [NH Flavors.com](http://NHFlavors.com).

The campaign revolves around the website [rallyforhrestaurants.com](https://www.rallyforhrestaurants.com). Visitors to the site gain a better understanding of what restaurants are doing to keep their customers and staff safe, says Somers. They can also learn eight different ways to help the industry – from leaving positive reviews after dining out and buying merch, to leaving generous tips – as well as offering creative ideas on how to experience and enjoy in-person dining or takeout. There’s even a [bingo game](#) that can earn the first five “winners” who do things like buy merch, thank a server or make reservations a grab bag of gift cards.

There is also a [directory](#) of participating food and drink establishments organized by region. Any restaurant, bar, brewery, or lodging foodservice property – NHLRA member or not – can be listed for free on the page.

For Priscilla Lane-Rondeau, owner of [900 Degrees Neopolitan Pizzeria](#), having the NHLRA in her corner helped her keep up with the crush of information that would have otherwise been impossible to navigate – like other restaurateurs, her hands were already full trying to keep employees working, and the restaurant lights on.

“When this first happened nobody knew what to do. All I knew was that we were going to keep the doors open and try to survive on take-out, and just see what happened. Every day we had to shift our sails, but all along the way, the NH Restaurant Association was the guiding factor. They kept us all informed,” Lane-Rondeau says. “Those first three months was like getting a degree in pandemic. I spent my first two to three hours every day just reading the information from Mike (Somers) before heading to the restaurant to figure out what was next.”

It hasn’t been all negative.

Both Laman and Lane-Rondeau said there has been something truly life-affirming about the level of camaraderie within the business. Both women came into the industry from corporate jobs, and say that the sense of support among fellow owners is like nothing they’ve experienced elsewhere.

“People work together in this industry,” says Lane-Rondeau who has had some #rallyforhrestaurant T-shirts made up and will be selling them to help boost the [NH Hospitality Relief Fund](#), which provides help to hospitality employees who are struggling due to hardship from lost wages.



900 Degrees will be selling these branded #RallyforNHRestaurants T-shirts, with all proceeds going to the [NH Hospitality Relief Fund](#).

Laman also talked about the level of resilience within the industry. Thanks to PPP loans, there were relatively few casualties of the pandemic among restaurants in the Greater Manchester area – with the exception of those that were likely operating too close to the edge before COVID-19.

And that is just another occupational hazard that those who enter the hospitality business accept as part of the game.

“Once the dust settled it became important to realize that the people who are in hospitality – we’re a different bunch. In our minds, the hardest road is the one worth taking,” Laman says. “My dad used to say to me when I had my hardest months through the growth of the company that if it was easy everyone would do it and no one would fail. If you choose this lifestyle, as a caterer or restaurant owner or hotelier, deep in your core you know it’s not going to be easy.”

And yet, Laman says, she is not naive about the road ahead.

“All of us have a time when we have to look in the mirror and ask how long we’re going to fight the fight for survival. I can’t tell you how many of our customers told me they weren’t going to go to a chain

restaurant, but rather, sat down with their families and made a commitment to eat small. At times I actually teared up over messages from customers asking how they could help – they wanted to buy gift cards and donate food to paramedics and first responders,” Laman says. “The heart and soul of it is that we’re all in this together.”

For more information, visit rallyfornhrestaurants.com or click the banner below.



About NHLRA

Founded in 1919, the New Hampshire Lodging & Restaurant Association is a statewide, non-partisan trade association that serves to promote, protect, and educate NH's hospitality industry.

About the New Hampshire Division of Travel & Tourism Development

The Division of Travel and Tourism Development, as part of the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development, works with the state's seven travel regions to increase visitation, travel and visitor expenditures in order to expand business activity and employment throughout the state. The division is responsible for domestic and international advertising and public relations, literature publication and distribution, www.visitnh.gov administration, grant administration and research to monitor and measure the impact of travel and tourism to the state. For more information about New Hampshire tourism, call 603-271-2665 or visit www.visitnh.gov.

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