

Exchange District BIZ

INNOVATION

All events had been canceled for summer and local businesses were struggling due to COVID-19 and the lack of foot traffic in the Exchange District. With Bijou Patio we aimed to boost traffic by creating a unique outdoor dining experience to draw people into the neighbourhood.

A collaboration between the Exchange District BIZ and area restaurants, the project's purpose was to support local businesses by encouraging visitors to the Exchange District with a COVID-safe option for enjoying the summer outdoors in Winnipeg's historic core.

During a pandemic, the safest space for people to gather is outside and we wanted to offer people visiting our neighbourhood the opportunity to enjoy its unique atmosphere while safely seated outdoors in Bijou Park. With limited and restricted patio spaces in Winnipeg, not all restaurants or bars in the district were able to accommodate enough customers. The smart food ordering system provided restaurants additional seats for their customers, while promoting the collaborative nature of businesses in the Exchange. The system had Bijou Patio "runners" deployed to pick up orders and deliver them right to the table.

It was also important to us that we served drinks in compostable cups rather than wasteful plastic ones so often used for outdoor dining. We provided a clearly marked compost bin and encouraged customers to use it for the cups and other suitable waste.

OUTCOME

This project provided direct and tangible benefits to local businesses, the public and our employees.

The strength and success of this project was the willingness of businesses to work together with the shared vision to bring people safely together to enjoy the Exchange District while navigating gathering restrictions during COVID-19.

Our goal to create more foot traffic in the area was successful, serving the retailers and galleries in the area who rely on walk-ins. It particularly benefitted restaurants through our app-based ordering system which was open for all Exchange District restaurants to join. Six of our restaurant partners did not have patios for the season, and Bijou Patio enabled them to reach more customers who were not comfortable dining indoors. During the two months the patio was open, it brought in approximately \$40,000 in sales from 1,422 order transactions that went directly to the restaurants.

By providing one of the few large outdoor patio spaces in Winnipeg this past summer, it allowed the residents of the neighbourhood and citizens of Winnipeg at large to experience the Exchange, a National Historic Site, and its unique local businesses safely during the pandemic.

Running the patio also enabled us to employ 15 people, providing work during a time where many in the hospitality industry were jobless.

We received consistent feedback that Bijou Patio should continue in future years. It will reopen mid-May, with a plan for it to be an annual occurrence—a mainstay in the community long after the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

EXECUTION

The Bijou Patio project began as a collaboration between the Exchange District and several area restaurants concerned about the impacts of COVID-19 on their business. We worked collaboratively to come up with a concept that would allow all interested restaurants to have equal access/benefit while also supporting other retail and businesses in the area. The result: a COVID-friendly outdoor patio selling locally crafted alcohol that made it incredibly easy for patrons to order food from the varied restaurants nearby. This innovative approach allowed several of the participating businesses to have a "virtual" patio, and they took advantage of this by encouraging their customers to either grab and go or to order directly from the site.

With the help and guidance of our entrepreneurial local restaurateurs, the Exchange District BIZ took on a leadership role managing

the project, leaning on the expertise of the restaurant industry as well as other partners such as urban planners in order to make a safe, inviting and cohesive space.

It took a village to execute our vision to bring the best of the Exchange safely outdoors for all to share. We remained agile and solution-oriented throughout the process.

REPRESENTATION

For Bijou Patio was driven by a collection of local businesses who came together to fill a greater need in our community - safe outdoor gathering space in the Exchange District. We received generous support from our partners: picnic tables (City of Winnipeg), fridges and kegs (Little Brown Jug, Nonsuch Brewery, King's Head Pub and Lark Bakery) and initial site design consultations (Scatliff Miller + Murray.) We also received invaluable support and resources from the City of Winnipeg in executing the project overall. The Exchange District BIZ maintenance team worked to keep the Bijou Patio clean and meticulously maintained—emptying the recycling, compost and garbage daily.

As a public plaza space, there was no requirement to order food or drink to experience the Bijou Patio. Everyone was always welcome to use the space, whether they were customers or not, creating a laid-back, inviting atmosphere. We provided wheelchair accessible public washrooms for all, serving the ongoing need for washrooms in the Exchange District. As a business district, we were able to provide safe, accessible and physically distant outdoor meeting space, and community members were able to access the picnic tables to eat their lunch outdoors.

REPLICATION

While the placemaking aspect of animating Bijou Patio has a hyper-local and unique manner to it, the project on the whole provides a simple yet innovative framework that could in many ways be replicated elsewhere.

The pop-up bar component was created from scratch and could be an accessible option to those who don't currently own the infrastructure to open such a temporary establishment, as long as they had access to a shipping container or similar structure.

Specifically, the inventive food ordering system could be replicated anywhere that has a collection of restaurants located within walking distance from the patio, supporting the local business community whether in a time of need such as COVID-19, or beyond.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

Due to the collaborative nature of the project and our ability to draw upon multiple partners skilled in various areas, many aspects of this project came together in a way that felt simple and smooth.

Other aspects presented more challenges, as we navigated the details around how best to permit and insure a public space. However, thanks to excellent support and advice from the City of Winnipeg and the desire of both the civil service and elected officials to see this project succeed, those challenges were overcome.