

## Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District

### INNOVATION

The goal of this project was simple – to create incentive for locals to continue to patronize downtown restaurants to keep their doors open and staff employed. Though D.I.D. staff pursued a simple goal and implemented simple strategies in its execution, our process and results speak to an ability to identify collaborative synergy within our district and forge public/private partnerships both in funding and implementation to develop simple but elegant solutions. The challenges we faced in helping Waiter on the Way to increase their staff in a timeframe fast enough to handle an ever-increasing volume of orders and then a move to citywide service showed our ability and nimbleness to activate multiple departments within our organization to respond to the logistical barriers of scaling the project from pilot, to in-district, to citywide all in the span of a few short months.

### OUTCOME

The initial program ran at the very outset of the pandemic shutdown from March 19 through June 15. It extended free delivery to 40 downtown restaurants. More than \$120,000 in orders was generated and the aforementioned “Virtual Tip Jar” generated more than \$95,000 in tips for restaurant workers. The program served as the inspiration for the larger partnership with the city of Fort Wayne in the fall.

The next phase of the program allowed Waiter on the Way to provide free meal delivery from participating local restaurants to Fort Wayne residents beginning October 1 through December 31 through the use of promotional code “DTFWCARES.” That effort resulted in nearly 40,000 orders, provided more than \$2.5 million in delivery sales and more than \$50,000 in tips to wait staff.

This is a 77% increase in orders and a 49% increase in dollars compared to the same time period in 2019.

Waiter on the Way hired 45 new drivers and five more office staff to support the expansion. Additionally, 30 new restaurants partnered with Waiter on the Way bringing the total number to 176.

Total Sales of the Program: \$2,647,212

Total Virtual Tip Jar Donations > \$145,000

Total Jobs Created by the Program: 50

### EXECUTION

Staff at the D.I.D. did an excellent job identifying the free delivery concept, forging a partnership with an in-district organization (Waiter on the Way), executing pilot logistics such as negotiation of incentive structure, encouraging participation from downtown restaurants, and promoting the opportunity to the Fort Wayne community. This initial pilot was carried from concept to partner execution in less than three weeks. This was made possible because of the effective and passionate work of our staff and the responsive and integrated reputation of the D.I.D in our shared community.

Another major example of D.I.D. staff innovation and responsive problem solving was in the ways in which we supported Waiter on the Way to scale up their staff to fulfill the volume of orders that were coming in. The sign-on bonuses created for new drivers, as well as the impromptu job fair we hosted and marketing execution to showcase all these elements in the community, are directly attributed to the way in which Waiter on the Way was able to add 50 positions in 2020.

### REPRESENTATION

The Dining Delivery Support Program was open initially to all participating restaurants within the 99 square blocks of our downtown district. Downtown Fort Wayne is home to more than 40 restaurants which represent a robust, multicultural offering of cuisine options as well as a variety of great owners and staff that represent diversity of ethnicity, gender and background.

Upon expansion of the program to citywide, the list of participating restaurants elevated to 176 restaurants which further increased the diversity of cuisine options, owners and staff that received positive support from the program.

## **REPLICATION**

This process appears to be fairly straightforward in its ability to be replicated effectively between markets if a delivery entity can be identified (preferably a local entity that has the flexibility to be nimble). Partners can be brought together for funding, marketing and facilitation. The organization that presides over the program should be ready to be responsive to the unique challenges each market will face and have the trust, support and reputation of their community as an honest broker.

## **COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY**

This project was always about finding simple solutions to simple problems. BIDs, as part of what and who we are, become uniquely qualified to find these solutions because, within a district, almost no other entity has a clearer total picture of the businesses, owners, buildings, public realm, and overall makeup of a region than its BID. We know the challenges that are being faced around the country because we are all working every day to support our own district ecosystems who, though distinctive in their location and individual structuring, are all made up of hard-working people who share many of the same goals, dreams, and aspirations. BIDs are uniquely able to identify and implement programs like this because we can recognize synergies within our ecosystems and draw correlations where others cannot because most others do not eat, sleep, and live their environments the way BID employees do. Downtowns or districts become our spheres of cultivation and influence where we are constantly aligning and adjusting forces within that sphere to support positive outcomes the way a farmer adjusts the PH balance in soil to ensure the best conditions for growth and prosperity.