



CITY OF FORT WAYNE

THOMAS C. HENRY, MAYOR

NEWS RELEASE

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Partnership assisted local restaurants during COVID-19 pandemic

Fort Wayne, Ind. – Waiter on the Way delivery sales skyrocketed following the launch of a free meal delivery program last year that helped local restaurants stay open during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initiative supported not only local restaurants but also restaurant workers. Delivery and take-out dining options were one of the crucial lifelines that enabled this hard-hit sector to survive the pandemic.

In September 2020, Mayor Tom Henry announced that the City of Fort Wayne entered a partnership with the Downtown Improvement District (DID) to help local restaurants and businesses weather the economic challenges of COVID-19.

The program built on the earlier success of a partnership between DID and Waiter on the Way. The initial program ran at the very outset of the pandemic shutdown from March through June. It extended free delivery to roughly 40 downtown restaurants.

More than \$120,000 in orders was generated and a brand-new feature added for this campaign generated more than \$95,000 in tips for restaurant workers and drivers. The program served as the inspiration for the larger partnership with the City of Fort Wayne in the fall.

Waiter on the Way was able 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.

That is a 77% increase in orders and a 49% increase in dollars compared to the same time period in 2019. The increase in orders directly helped longtime local businesses one order at a time.

Sales at Fort Wayne’s Famous Coney Island went up 400% after joining Waiter on the Way delivery service.

“Our partnership with the city of Fort Wayne, Downtown Improvement District and Waiter on the Way, for free delivery, helped our carryout sales thrive, easing the sting of the decline of dine in customers due to the pandemic,” said James Todoran, owner of Coney Island.

“Quality of place amenities like our thriving restaurant scene have been instrumental in accelerating Downtown Fort Wayne’s upward momentum,” said Michael Galbraith, President of the Downtown



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Improvement District. “Helping them make it through the COVID crisis is absolutely crucial to our future as a City, County and region.”

Waiter on the Way hired 45 new drivers and 5 more office staff to support the expansion. Additionally, 30 new restaurants partnered with Waiter on the Way bringing the total number to 176.

The Meal Service Delivery program was funded from the City’s allocation of CARES Act dollars received through the State of Indiana. The campaign investment was \$207,855.16.

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