

Matawan creates lakeside dining program to help restaurants

By
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MATAWAN – Municipal officials in Matawan have joined forces with local restaurants to create a safe haven for customers during the time of COVID-19. The Matawan lakeside dining initiative began in August and is expected to continue as long as the weather permits.

Business Administrator Scott Carew said the idea for lakeside dining “was born from a meeting of our Economic Development Committee, led by Councilman Brian Livesey and including Borough Council President Deana Gunn, as we were discussing ways to help local restaurants begin to recover from the COVID-related shutdown.”

Participating restaurants are benefiting from increased capacity while their normal operating procedures are limited by restrictions related to COVID-19.

"As long as the weather permits, the borough will schedule Matawan restaurants to use a dedicated area at Lake Lefferts Park from Thursday through Sunday," Carew said. "The restaurants will take reservations, prepare the food in their kitchen, deliver it to the park and serve their customers."

Each participating restaurant will provide staff, table linens and utensils.

"The borough is providing the space, restroom facilities, and tables and chairs. We are treating the area with pest control, removing garbage, and providing assistance with traffic and parking issues," Carew said. "Finally, the borough is allowing BYOB for this program."

Restaurant operators are not being charged to participate in the lakeside dining program. Carew said the goal is to help the businesses and "to provide a great outdoor experience for our residents."

Carew credited Matawan's public information officer, Cathy Zavorskas, with "passionately working countless hours recruiting restaurants, ordering supplies and working with me and others on the development of the plan."

Zavorskas said it took about two months to get the program going.

"The goal was to find ways to rise above the challenges presented by COVID-19 and give restaurants an opportunity to expand their service to a broader number of people, offer an exciting and enjoyable outdoor dining option for residents, and to use a major Matawan asset, the lakefront," Zavorskas said.

"It required a team effort to accomplish the various tasks necessary to successfully meet that goal, including the mayor and Borough Council members who gave us their full support. Once we had everything in place, the mayor and council members passed temporary resolutions waiving the application fee and allowing BYOB in the designated area during dining time," she said.

"Aby's Mexican Restaurant owner, Elias Martinez, and the Burger Shop manager ... both agreed to participate whenever we were ready to go," Zavorskas said. "I met with each of them at the lakefront to review the location, the logistics and the plans to determine exactly what was needed."

The lakeside dining program began on Aug. 20.

"Our first establishment was the Burger Shop and the feedback from them and their customers was fantastic," Carew said.

Gunn, the council president, said, "I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the work of so many people and departments that made this happen. Partnering with our businesses is not only a win for our local restaurants, but it allows patrons to enjoy their food with a fabulous view.

"We have been working to bring more programs to this location. Lake Lefferts is not just a beautiful natural resource, it's now a destination.

"In unique times like this, it's important to come up with creative solutions to support our businesses and bring new options to our residents. Despite all the challenges of COVID-19, we are committed to doing just that. Our lakeside dining program is one example," Gunn said.

For more information about the lakeside dining program, call 732-566-3898.

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