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Recommended Citation

McCollum, Emily A. ms, "Food Trucks Amidst California Lockdown" (2020). *Humboldt in the Time of COVID - Digital Archive*. 7.

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JMC 482

October 18th 2020

Food Trucks Amidst California Lockdown

Within the last year the shelter in place ordinance enacted by Gov. Newsom in order to slow the spread of covid has also slowed the spread of commerce, disproportionately effecting small businesses all over California, specifically restaurants. As the pandemic lingers on in America all states and even counties are within different parameters of reopening businesses.

While the lockdown was swift and sudden, the reopening process has proven to be anything but. According to the [Yelp Economic Average Report](#), more than 163,000 businesses listed on its website closed down between March and August. However, the latest [Q3 Yelp Economic Average Report](#) shows an upsurge in new businesses that cater to open air food services such as farmers markets and food trucks.

The trusty food truck is a prime example of a business that was largely unaffected by the lockdown ordinance. Food trucks have been busy feeding essential workers and other local patrons, while the majority of people have begun relying on home cooking during the California lockdown. As businesses alter their hours of operation and some even closing for good, food trucks have maintained and even seen a rise in business.

“It doesn’t affect us at all and it brings a little more customers too,” said Andres Mendez, the owner and Operator of Romans Kitchen, a food truck located in Arcata California.

Food trucks tend to have a negative reputation for cheap, quick food on the go. They feed working class people and sometimes have a negative, working class reputation, which is why they are also referred to as roach coaches. But within the last decade or so food trucks have grown in popularity and become an integral part of the spectrum that is, a good restaurant experience. Food trucks often hold themselves highly and Romans Kitchen is no exception.

“I’ve been living here for many years and I know what Humboldt county needs. We are a food truck, but we are a one-of-a-kind food truck,” said Mendez.

Mendez grew up in Mexico, learning how to work with food from his mother who is also a business owner. Throughout his life Mendez perfected his craft and ended up in Humboldt. After living here for nearly twenty years, he has established himself and his business within the local community and began serving the public in 2015, he has maintained steady business ever since.

Romans Kitchen is a thriving business, the local allocation of ingredients allows this food truck to create a reciprocating relationship within the Arcata community. Mendez, being a local Humboldt resident, uses his business to support local infrastructure in the food that he purchases and the customers that it serves.

According to Mendez, owning a food truck is better than a traditional restaurant because it is cost effective. Food trucks allow for the focus to remain on the food, providing a quality product without the overhead costs of a brick and mortar building. The decision to own a food truck against a building, is a choice that sets romans kitchen apart from other businesses.

Local ingredients, low cost infrastructure and community focus creates the high-quality food that gets people talking. If your end product is good, word will spread naturally and your customers will likely bring more business your way. While the price may be a bit higher compared to other food trucks, the quality of the food will always bring in business.

“If you do things right, people are going to like it and people are going to come back,” said Mendez.

Humboldt county food trucks have proven to hold strong in the face of adversity, continuing to serve their public and maintain the same quality as expected throughout this unexpected year. While the lockdowns were largely unforeseeable, Mendez sympathizes with his fellow colleagues.

“I would be in the same situation if I had an establishment,” said Mendez. But for this food truck owner, significant change started earlier than March.

November of last year, Mendez lost his wife and business partner to an ardoise battle with cancer. Assuming the role of primary caretaker of his three children, as well as the sole proprietor to his business, Mendez has been working double time to fulfill many adult roles. A newly single dad has taken upon the responsibility of a business and a family, to manage all of this in the midst of a global pandemic and the economic crisis, while still turning a profit, is extraordinary given the circumstances.

Mendez’s business is a prime example of adaptation, but his story is a key illustration of a life that doesn’t stop moving. While unexpected things will always arise, adapting and overcoming adversity is the only way to move forward. Making worthwhile progress is a thankless endeavor, and success, in the end, will hopefully provide comfort and security for those who get there.

Significant life altering change can happen to anyone at any time. No one is impervious to this force. The pandemic and our reaction to it has cause overarching change for the majority of the population. This relevance creates a shared aspect and this often leads us to forget that the train keeps moving, that life and time will continue to progress, and so should we.

