

Restaurants grapple with 10-person capacity under 'red' zone

Written By **Jessica Laurenza**

Last month, the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region moved to the 'red-control' zone meaning restaurants are able to open indoor dining with a maximum capacity of 10 people.

Dufferin entered the 'lockdown' phase with the rest of Ontario on December 26 and was subject to the stay-at-home order implemented January 14. These measures severely impacted restaurants who had to shut down indoor service.

Local restaurant owners have mixed views on whether to provide indoor dining with the 10-patron limit.

Shannon's Tap and Grill in Shelburne has re-opened their indoor dining for the third time as of last March. Since COVID-19 first hit, they've implemented sophisticated cleaning protocols, they've installed plexiglass between all booths, and expanded their patio to allow for more seating in the summer months.

Prior to COVID, the owner, Shannon Chahal didn't have much of a takeout business as most people would eat and drink in-house. Now, she says she's able to pump out double or triple the amount of food due to the community's 'dedication and loyalty.'

'People have been very understanding which I'm so appreciative of as a business owner,' says Shannon.

Above all else, Shannon told the Free Press she's found a true 'appreciation for life' during the pandemic. She says a lesson she's learned is to 'maximize your time with the people you love the most because you don't know when you're going to see them again.'

Shannon's Tap and Grill is open seven days a week from 12:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. for takeout or indoor dining. However, they are encouraging those wishing to dine indoors to make a reservation.

Conversely, Michelle and Rick Arsenault, owners of Orangeville's Bluebird Cafe & Grill have decided not to re-open their dining room to the public until they move to the orange zone.

They had difficulty in the early winter months asking people to leave when their time was up at their table or asking people to wait outside because of the ten-person capacity.

'We are huge believers in people over profit,' says Michelle.

She added that every dollar is definitely worth it for the couple but they 'want to make more important decisions and factor in everything before [they] open the doors.'

Since COVID-19, Bluebird has opened a 22-person patio along Broadway, increased the number of people noticing their separate takeout service on Armstrong Street, and used the slower season to help kitchen staff bloom and build their confidence.

Michelle and Rick are pivoting their business to provide guests with takeout theme-night dinner packages or paint nights. For Valentine's Day, they offered a three-course meal with two bottles of wine where you could do a virtual guided wine tasting with one of the restaurant's wine representatives.

'We keep moving the Bluebird forward'coming up with creative things to do with guests to keep our hospitality alive,' explains Rick.

The couple wants to thank the community for their ongoing support. They said, 'It means so much to us. It's the reason we keep

going. We have the best community ever here.?

The Bluebird Cafe is open Tuesday through Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. for takeout orders.

Further restrictions for restaurants in the red-zone include: tables must be at least two-metres apart, masks are only to be removed when eating or drinking, no more than four people are able to sit together, and music may not be louder than a normal conversation.