

The Missouri Times

Almost every Missouri restaurant laid off, furloughed employees during health crisis

BY KAITLYN SCHALLHORN ON MAY 5, 2020

Almost every Missouri restaurant has laid off or furloughed employees since the coronavirus pandemic hit the state, according to the National Restaurant Association.

The recent survey from the national organization, in tandem with the Missouri Restaurant Association, found 93 percent of restaurant operators furloughed or laid off workers. An additional 8 percent said they plan to lay off or furlough employees within the next month.

More than 171,000 (or 76 percent) of Missouri's restaurant workers have lost their jobs during the outbreak, the National Restaurant Association said.

"The impacts of COVID-19 have been devastating for Missouri's restaurants and foodservice workers," Missouri Restaurant Association CEO Bob Bonney said. "In April alone, Missouri's restaurant and foodservice industry is estimated to lose more than \$775 million in sales. Without a clear solution and action by lawmakers, the local restaurants that anchor so many Missouri communities, may not recover even after the statewide stay at home order expires."

Missouri was under a stay at home order for most of April. But even before, restaurants closed dining areas and adjusted to provide delivery or curbside service — if they didn't close altogether.

The state began to reopen Monday. Restaurants can again provide dining services but with social distancing and other precautionary measures in place.

Despite the quick pivot some restaurants made, carry out, curbside, and delivery services are “generally insufficient to lift them out” of the financial situation COVID-19 has caused, Bonney said. Most restaurants are only doing 25 to 30 percent of what they would normally do, he predicted.

And even with the state reopening, there’s no way to tell when Missourians will feel as comfortable dining out as frequently as they once did. But Bonney said he received “a number of calls that the public’s response was quite positive” Monday.

“Restaurants have been, above all others, reaching citizens in providing opportunities for the middle class. It has a ripple effect on the economy,” Bonney told The Missouri Times. “Our jobs are in every community across the state. There’s always a place to get a restaurant meal in every community. We’re aware that we’re not the only industry hurting — but we are hurting as much as any.”

Bonney also praised Gov. Mike Parson for measures he’s taken to relax some regulatory burdens on the restaurant industry, from selling mixed alcoholic beverages to go to merchandising unprepared food and groceries.

“I think he’s done a wonderful job through his decision making through this process,” Bonney said. “One can only imagine the stress he’s been under.”

As of Tuesday morning, more than 8,700 Missourians have tested positive for coronavirus, and 358 people have died.