

# Kawartha Lakes restaurateurs hesitate, wonder if opening their patios makes sense

*Sarah Sobanski*

With [the news that the province is allowing patios to reopen](#) and [Kawartha Lakes accepting proposals for patio expansions](#), local restaurateurs are evaluating what makes sense for them.

Charles McDonald, owner of The Grand Experience in Lindsay and chair of the Lindsay DBIA, has a couple of options when it comes to expanding his patio. He could take it down the street or into the back, where the restaurant has a takeout area, but in the days before restaurant patios were allowed to open on Friday (June 12), he was still working out the logistics.

“We’re still learning what we need to do,” he says, noting that COVID-19 restrictions make everyone’s job a little harder. He lists getting staff back to work safely, getting masks and getting licences for new customer numbers from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

“I do like the idea that things are starting to open up, but for all of us, we need to get back to normal business and whatever that new norm is,” he says.

If the province says that restaurants can only operate at 50 per cent of their capacities, McDonald is looking at seating 25 people or less. He’s wondered if it’s worth reopening – the same of which can be said for other patio owners in Lindsay, many of which are small.

The Olympia is one such restaurant. Owner Nicki Dedes says she can open up garage doors in the front of the restaurant to have open-air dining, but her actual patio can only sit 12 people with restrictions. In a 100-seat restaurant, that doesn’t make sense.

“We’re lucky that we have an established business and we would ride out this wave,” she says. The Olympia has been around since the early 1900s. It’s remained standing through world wars and other hardships.

Still, Dedes is preparing for when the province opens for dining in. She’s fine-tuning her menu and website, spacing tables for physical distancing, considering face shields for her staff and learning new sanitizing strategies.

“I think the government is going to wait and see how things go with patios over the weekend,” she says. “This weekend will be telling.”

The Olympia could also expand its patio into the alleyway, but Dedes isn’t sure how staff would monitor it. Whatever the future holds, she says, there’s at least one good thing to come from these hard times.

“This whole situation has shown the true value of local businesses and how they’re viewed by the public in our community. Individuals now have the power to choose

how they want to spend their time and their money and their resources,” she says.

“Having a renewed interest and seeing the value of supporting local businesses, like eating, dining, living (and) spending in the place that you live, is almost revolutionary.”

She says the renewed interest is empowering for local business owners, and they’ll look to show their appreciation back to customers in the experience of local dining and shopping.