

Food Truck Fridays Are Go: These trucks won't stop rolling



Any Providence resident knows that summer is food truck season. While featured at nearly all outdoor events, none highlights them more than the traditional Food Truck Fridays at Roger Williams Park. So, what's a food truck fan to do when no-contact, 6-foot distanced delivery and take-out are the new normal?

In the era of social distancing, Food Truck Fridays certainly look a bit different than in years prior.

Instead of bustling crowds, local music showcases and community intermingling, the focus has been on finding solutions concerning how to enforce proper social distancing regulations while serving diners. But event organizer and owner of FoodTrucksIn, Eric Weiner, is optimistic that Rhode Islanders can still get their food truck fix this summer, albeit with some precautions put in place.

“We’re going to give the trucks and the consumers and the musicians as much as we can and hope that it’s enough,” says Weiner. As the RI Bucket Drummers finish off their set for May 22nd’s Food Truck Friday Facebook Livestream, tips come pouring in from their virtual audience. The livestream, humbly staged in a driveway, is one of many alterations made to the usual operation. It simultaneously gives a platform for local musicians to once again perform live and advertises the trucks that are open for business and where to find them.

Weiner explains that trucks have been strategically spread out across the state, limiting two trucks per location, to ensure that large congregations of customers won’t flock to a single spot. Truck owners are also required by the Department of Health and Department of Business to adhere to the same safety rules and standards as brick-and-mortar restaurants that have been put in place due to the pandemic, including not allowing more than five people to gather around the trucks.

According to Weiner, the fact that food trucks generally aren’t responsible for providing seating removes a major concern that non-mobile establishments must contend with, as folks expect take-away services only. The real problem lies in getting customers to the trucks at all. When not working large events, a food truck typically relies on finding the ideal parking spot with lots of foot traffic to drive sales, but there has never been fewer people strolling the streets. With no Food Truck Fridays in the park, outdoor festivals or even catering gigs to be had, food trucks are in desperate need of patronage.

Shishkaberry’s, specializing in chocolate-covered seasonal fruits, is one such truck that has felt the impact. Deeply reliant on the summer events that draw hundreds of potential customers, co-owner Steve Aulenback is anxious for crowd restrictions to be relaxed, “...But in due time and when it’s safe to do so,” he says. In the meantime, you can find the Shishkaberry’s truck parked right next to Friskie Fries in Johnston, ready to serve up some sweet treats to-go.

As a community, we are mourning the loss of the summer season we look forward to all year — the one jam-packed with events where we can support local businesses and artists. We may be stuck at home, but the next time you’re hankering for take-out, check out the PVD Food Truck Events Facebook page for updates on where the trucks are parked. Order ahead if possible, remember your face mask for pick-up and respect any safety guidelines truck owners are putting in place.

“We’re optimistic that, one way or another, throughout this season and into the future, we’re going to continue to do everything we can to bring you experiences to enjoy local food trucks, community musicians and local beverages,” says Weiner. He is working hard to keep food truck culture alive and well. And all you have to do to help is order some grub!