

Two years after a shutdown was forced by COVID-19, chefs and restaurant operators look back — and ahead

‘I don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel’

By Josh Noel | Chicago Tribune

It was supposed to last two weeks.

But rather than anything so temporary, Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s unprecedented statewide shutdown of Illinois bars and restaurants issued two years ago Wednesday — March 16, 2020 — ushered in a pandemic reality that walloped the hospitality industry with a torrent of unprecedented challenges.

It’s been an uneven and circuitous path — mask mandates, limited capacities, reopening for indoor service, closing for indoor service again, vaccine mandates and at least three sizable COVID-19 surges have upended old habits.

To commemorate the moment, we gathered four bar and restaurant owners and operators to look back — and ahead. The Tribune sat down with Jason Vincent,

chef and owner of Logan Square’s Giant and Chef’s Special Cocktail Bar; Erick Williams, executive chef and owner of Virtue Restaurant & Bar in Hyde Park; Rohini

Dey, owner of downtown’s Indian-Latin staple Vermilion and founder of Let’s Talk Womxn, a restaurant industry advocacy group for women chefs and restaurateurs; and Jeff Donahue, director of operations for Heisler Hospitality chain and co-owner of Big Kids and Ludlow Liquors.

Vincent hosted the panel at Giant on a Tuesday afternoon. The discussion was edited for length and clarity.

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TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

“The whole ‘The guest is always right’ idea, that’s fallen by the wayside. We’ve seen so much abuse.”

— Rohini Dey, above, owner of downtown’s Indian-Latin Vermilion and founder of Let’s Talk Womxn, a restaurant industry advocacy group

Chicago Tribune



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FRIDAY, MARCH 18, 2022

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



Volunteer Isiah Langson, left, directs a driver as Marsha Washington pumps gas for another person while other vehicles line up for gas at the Citgo Gas Station at 91st Street and Stony Island Avenue on Thursday. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Gas giveaway turns into a traffic tie-up

Latest venture for city businessman, philanthropist, erstwhile candidate

By Madeline Buckley and Olivia Olander
Chicago Tribune

During a trip to a gas station last week, perennial political candidate Willie Wilson watched the numbers tick up, the cost to fill his gas tank even surprising the wealthy businessman.

“If I take notice of high prices ... what about people not in the income bracket I’m in?” Wilson told the Tribune.

Thus, an idea was born, and Wilson decided to dedicate \$200,000 for gas Thursday morning, offer-

ing people \$50 gas cards at the pump until funds were exhausted later that day.

But the good intention yielded a messy reality: People hurting from record-high gas prices came out in droves, causing traffic jams and unmanageable crowds at times. Some reported using nearly their last drop of gas to get to the station — only to be turned away due to a chaotic, Black Friday-like scene. Others reported a smoother process and were grateful for a break at the pump.

The complicated rollout

Turn to Giveaway, Page 4



Chicago police officers direct traffic as motorists line up for free gas at the BP station at North Pulaski Road and West Montrose Avenue in the Uptown neighborhood on Thursday. Former mayoral candidate Willie Wilson was donating \$200,000 of gasoline at select stations throughout the city. JOSE M. OSORIO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WAR IN UKRAINE

Cities under attack across the country

Search for survivors in Mariupol as scores are killed nationwide

By Andrea Rosa
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Rescue workers searched for survivors Thursday in the ruins of a theater blown apart by a Russian airstrike in the besieged city of Mariupol, while scores of Ukrainians across the country were killed in ferocious urban attacks on a school, a hostel and other sites.

Hundreds of civilians had been taking shelter in the grand, columned theater in central Mariupol after their homes were destroyed in three weeks of fighting in the southern port city of 430,000.

More than a day after the airstrike, there were no reports of deaths. With communications disrupted across the city and movement difficult because of shelling and other fighting, there were conflicting reports on whether anyone had emerged from the rubble.

“We hope and we think that some people who stayed in the shelter under the theater could survive,” said Petro Andrushchenko, an official with the mayor’s office. He said the building had a relatively modern basement bomb shelter designed to withstand

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Media legends will be remembered

Broadcasting mainstays Spann and Dee left their mark on Chicago

By Darcel Rockett
Chicago Tribune

Merri Dee was described by the late performer Nancy Wilson, in her 2013 memoir with the words “trailblazing TV and radio icon” and “girl-next-door” in Dee’s “Merri Dee: Life Lessons on Faith, Forgiveness & Grace.”

Having spent 43 years in Chicago broadcasting, primarily at WGN-Ch. 9, Dee was an on-air reporter and anchor for WGN from 1972-1983 and was director of community relations until 2008, when she retired.

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Merri Dee in 1970 and Pervis Spann at WXFM-FM. MAURICE SEYMOUR AND CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Former alderman sentenced to 13 months for fraud

Ricardo Muñoz pleads guilty to spending political cash on tuition, trips and tickets. Page 3

‘Hammer of justice’ raised, Smollett gets time to appeal

Actor’s legal win sees him dodge weeks in Cook County Jail — at least for now. Page 6



Tom Skilling’s forecast High 41 Low 37

Chicago Weather Center: Forecast on Page 16

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