

**RESTAURANTS from page 1A**

Kurt Hargens is co-owner of 1285 Restobar on Bay Street in Historic Old Town Florence and said he has been pleasantly surprised by the number of meals he has served since the public became aware of the new attention being given to take-out options.

"We got off to a really great start for our first week of take-out orders. We are doing a limited menu of pizzas, calzones and chowder every day from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Additionally, we are doing prime rib on Wednesday nights, lasagna on Thursday nights and spaghetti and meatballs on Friday nights," Hargens said. "Our prime rib and lasagna nights have been particularly well received. The key is just having people call ahead and be a little patient when we are busy."

1285 Restobar is one of the members of a loose coalition of local restaurants, the Florence Restaurant Alliance (FRA), that is trying to find a way to keep some staff working while feeding the community.

Elaine McMillan, co-owner of Homegrown Public House and Brewery, is one of the most active of the FRA members and has been staying connected with other

local restaurant owners.

During the pandemic, McMillan has found that while many people have been dramatically impacted by closures, there is a sense that a return to business will happen for most — but not all of Florence's eateries.

"I have to tell you, some of the conversations have been heart-breaking. I am so sad to hear what is happening to the local economy. I shed a few tears," said McMillan. "I know, for us, it has been OK until this week and it's been a struggle. To-go orders are not paying the bills and we are currently opening the brewery on Fridays for 'Friday Fills.' We have several things on tap, including our own brews."

Homegrown is offering growlers as well, which includes the debut of new reusable growlers this week.

"The food operations at the brewery hope to restart in the next few weeks," McMillan said. "We are in the middle of deep cleaning, painting and brewing some new brew. We have had a good turn out on Fridays, so we want to thank our hometown for the love."

For the staff at Fresh Harvest Café, located at 3056 Highway

101, they wanted to thank the community for its support to this point in time and offered some inspiring words.

"Things have been challenging to say the least, but we have faith. The positive side of this is that our family has come together," said Gilmar and Angela Ortiz. "Our goal is to keep doors open through this challenging time. We know many of our regular customers do not cook or have a stove, so we have been able to bless them with meals. We are here serving our community on a daily basis. We are grateful for the support we have come our way."

For the past century, American farmers have increased the quantity and variety of food available to the American consumer, providing abundance at affordable prices, and with few limitations. In many ways, it has been a golden age of food production. Domestication of livestock and poultry has been maximized and the integration of organic concepts into the food supply chain is ongoing.

Spot shortages in the past decade of orange juice or peanut butter barely registered with the public and were quickly forgotten when the missing products reappeared.

That lack of appreciation surrounding food has changed considerably in the past 90 days. The inability to open business doors, coupled with the prospects of a long-term prohibition on restaurants from reopening for in-house dining, has shaken local restaurant owners and clientele alike.

The real potential of food shortages was recently brought home to many residents when shelves in local grocery stores were at times empty of staples like sugar and flour. Eating, transporting and distributing food — and the process that makes the almost unlimited access we have to food possible — is in jeopardy in a way rarely experienced by Americans.

The problem comes from multiple directions, as retail food suppliers, restaurants and processors of food products are in danger of being unable to adapt to a rapidly changing set of circumstances as they lose customers and workers to the pandemic.

Another uncertainty facing local restaurateurs is the possibility that the meat and vegetables needed to prepare menu items will simply be unavailable. Interruptions in the processing of meat, along with fields of rotting

vegetables and tankers of unusable dairy, are potential realities according to processors and farmers.

There are a number of moving parts in the food equation which include planting, harvesting and processing on one side of the ledger, and the distribution and sales of those items on the other. The timing of both of these is subject

to a number of factors, including weather, labor, transportation costs and the unpacking and placement of food in stores.

All of these factors must come together for a successful food supply chain to operate sustainably.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued updated guidelines for restaurants to deal

See SUPPLY page 8A

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