

## SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

### Hospitality Roundup: Hotel Owners Hope for a Boost as Peak Travel Season Approaches; Wawa to Open in Plantation

Cooler temperatures in the north normally lead to peak occupancy at South Florida hotels from November to February each year.

Many local hotel managers are banking on this trend holding true this year, even though some health experts expect another spike in Covid-19 cases this fall.

Covid-19 has led to historic lows in hotel metrics like occupancy and average daily room rate. But as businesses throughout the region reopened, some of those abysmal numbers improved.

Chris Bielski, director of sales at the Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa, said occupancy numbers are trending upward over the last month. He said that leads him to believe this year's travel season could still be on track.

Most of the hotel's guests are leisure travelers driving in from other Florida counties, he said. Bielski anticipates that the state entering phase three of its reopening plan could spark interest among travelers from elsewhere in the U.S. Other states easing travel restrictions to and from Florida could also increase demand.

Bielski added that many travelers canceled reservations for the summer once they learned they would have to self-quarantine for two weeks if they traveled to Florida.

"Since those travel restrictions have been lifted, we're seeing more bookings coming from major source markets like New York and Chicago," he said.

Scott Webb, president of Delray Beach-based Kolter Hospitality, said occupancy at his firm's South Florida hotels plateaued at about 50% in recent weeks. That's up from the tri-county average of 20% to 30% in April and May, according to hotel analytics company STR.

Webb predicts occupancy could be between 75% and 85% by the start of 2021 due to leisure travelers from outside of Florida. It's not the 95% occupancy at the start of 2020, but it's still a marked improvement from the summer lows.

"I do believe people are frustrated and tired, and it's about to get brutally cold up north, so I think the season is going to be strong," Webb said. "If peak season is not good, then it's going to be a tough year."

While occupancy has improved and may increase further, he said room rates remain low, making it difficult to turn a profit.

STR reports that the average daily rate in August was down 25%, year-over-year, in Miami-Dade County.

Webb explained that, in order to increase prices again, there needs to be compression in the market, meaning more hotels in the region need to be at about 75% occupancy or higher to create competitive pricing.

"When you're sitting at 50% occupancy, it's really hard to push the rate," he said.

#### **Retail Roundup**

##### **DashBar**

The salon/spa concept debuted at 25 S.W. Ninth St. in Miami's Brickell neighborhood. Founded and owned by Carla Olivia, the salon occupies 2,700 square feet.

##### **Bowlero**

The nation's largest bowling alley chain signed a long-term lease to occupy 62,000 square feet at 21046 Commercial Trail, just east of Town Center at Boca Raton. Katz & Associates, which has an office in Boca Raton, represented the landlord in the deal, while Miami Beach-based The Comras Co. represented the tenant.

##### **Winn-Dixie**

Two years after parent company Southeastern Grocers emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy, Winn-Dixie is slated to open a new South Florida store. Formerly occupied by Earth Fare, the retail space at 8855 W. Boynton Beach Blvd. will reopen as a Winn-Dixie on Nov. 11.

##### **Wawa**

The convenience store and gas station chain opened its newest South Florida store Oct. 14 at 13 S. State Road 7 in Plantation. The company said this location will employ about 40 associates.

##### **Body Routers Fitness**

One of the few gym concepts to open during the pandemic, Body Routers Fitness debuted Oct. 15 at 4838 N.W. 167th St. in Miami Gardens. Owner Ray Irizarry said he secured the space in February, with plans to renovate and open quickly, but the pandemic forced him to delay the opening to October.