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D.C. Restaurant Market: Not As Depressed As You Might Think

Posted by **Tim Carman** on Feb. 3, 2009, at 6:41 pm



College Park-based **Joe Spinelli** has been in the restaurant business for more than 30 years, consulting and supplying and troubleshooting for some of the biggest (and smallest) eateries in the country, from **California Pizza Kitchen** to the **Amsterdam Falafelshop**. He's probably consulted on more restaurants than most people have eaten in. As such, Spinelli's seen a lot of down markets, but he doesn't think the current economy will affect restaurants in the D.C. region as harshly as those in other areas. He says his **consulting company** is still opening three to four restaurants a week in our market.

There's one caveat to all those openings, though: Most are in the so-called fast-casual market, places like **Organic to Go** and **Nando's Peri-Peri**, where the food is relative cheap and where folks don't have to leave a tip. "People are still going out to eat," Spinelli says. "They're just not going to **Ruth's Chris**."



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Say it ain't so, Joe! So does that mean gloom and doom for small, independent, white-tablecloth restaurants in the area?

Not necessarily, he says. While recessions tend to "clean house" in a market—close down restaurants, in other words, that are barely covering the bills in a good economy—Spinelli says that fine-dining operations with "solid programs" and decent capital will survive this downturn. D.C., he says, will not hurt as bad as other cities, mostly because we have the federal government to keep pumping money into the local economy.

For example, Spinelli says, restaurants in Atlanta are already suffering. He recently visited the city, which he called a "distressed area."

"All the restaurants are dying," he says.

Image by Flickr user [NCinDC](#)

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