

# Business

## Eateries embrace patios to lure exiled smokers

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Vivian Junco (left), Tara McCredie and friends enjoy the nice weather and the fresh air outside on the patio at Port City Java on Capitol Hill. Katie Falkenberg (The Washington Times)

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D.C. restaurants have a big dish of alfresco on the menu for the spring.

An increasing number of restaurants have applied for permits to open sidewalk cafes and allow patrons to dine outside.

The number of sidewalk cafe permits filed with the District's Department of Transportation typically rises with the spring temperatures. But this year, that increase is a lot larger.

This month, 13 restaurants have applied for the permit, compared with five during April 2006 and just one two years ago. So far this year, 20 restaurants have applied for sidewalk cafe permits, a large jump from 13 as of this time last year and seven in 2005.

Some restaurateurs say the increase can be attributed to the District's smoking ban, which went into effect in January and outlawed smoking in all restaurants and bars, with few exceptions. Whether patrons can smoke on a patio is up to the restaurant owner.

"I'm sure it has a lot to do with the smoking ban. We have a lot of people who smoke," said Herbert Kerschbaumer, owner and executive chef at Jack's Restaurant & Bar on 17th Street Northwest, which opened earlier this year with a patio.

But will all the fresh air that lures people to sidewalk cafes be clouded by the smoke of cigarette-toting diners? Mr. Kerschbaumer, who doesn't take reservations on his patio, says no.

"It gives everyone, especially the smokers, a fair chance to sit outside," he said. "When you're sitting around outside, the nonsmoker at the next table isn't as offended as they would be if they're sitting in a confined space."

Jack's has applied to expand its 28-seat patio, which is "100 percent" filled on warm days, to 60 seats, Mr. Kerschbaumer said.

"Every restaurant that can do them does them," said Joe Spinelli, president of Restaurant Consultants Inc., a College Park restaurant consulting group, adding that he sees a seasonal increase in the number of restaurants applying for patio permits each year.

Sidewalk cafes can be big money for restaurants. On warm days, some diners seek out restaurants with patios. For restaurants, the rent is cheap: They are taxed \$5 or \$10 per square foot each year, compared with rent three or four times that much in prime downtown locations.

"They're moneymakers. It's like having free space," said Mr. Spinelli, who assisted BLT Steak on I Street Northwest in applying for a patio permit this month. "Where else do you pay \$5 per square foot in Washington, D.C.?"

Patios also serve as free advertising to passers-by.

For Steve Chung, owner of the 1791 D.C. delicatessen on Eighth Street Northwest, the patio is an opportunity to expand the seating area and remind people the restaurant exists in its somewhat-hidden location.

"It's a form of advertising," he said of the tables and chairs he hopes to place out front. "We're a hidden building and have semi-tinted windows."

Others attribute the increase in permits to the smoking ban as well as general interest in being outside.

"Everybody works in an office," said David Metzner, who co-owns Uptown Tavern on Connecticut Avenue Northwest, which plans to open its patio in about a month. "They want to be outside during lunch or dinner."

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