

Bonnie Cafe plans reopening at airport

*The current reopening
only applies to the
Mount Vernon location*

BY JOSH JONES
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MOUNT VERNON — The owners of the Bonnie Cafe recently discussed their plans to reopen the Mount Vernon Outland Airport location on June 1.

Brian and Melissa Hubbard, owners of the Bonnie Cafe, were present for the recent meeting of the Mount Vernon Airport Authority (MVAA) Board of Commissioners, where they shared an update on the status of the restaurant. Brian Hubbard expressed wanting to reopen the restaurant, but said that he wanted to speak to the airport board first and get the commissioners' thoughts.

"The governor, when he did the stay at home we were exempt and I still believe we are exempt as a carryover from the first order. We decided that I couldn't go into these other restaurants and look the owners in the face, knowing that we fell under a loophole out here," Brian said. "I am sorry, but I just couldn't do it back then, not knowing what the virus was, but it is time. There are restaurants in Fairfield that are open, in Herrin that are open, county boards are voting to open their counties back up. So it is time that we make a decision ourselves or what are we fighting for? There isn't going to be anything left to fight for if we don't do something soon."

The Hubbards said that they value the opinion of the board on matter and have also looked to gauge the reaction of the public over social media.

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Sentinel Photo/JOSH JONES

REOPENING SOON — The Mount Vernon location of the Bonnie Cafe located at Mount Vernon Outland Airport is planning to reopen on June 1. The cafe originally closed down in the middle of March due to concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cafe was not required to close at that time, due to an exemption in the executive order for being located in the airport, but chose to do so to help better protect the public.

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MELISSA HUBBARD
OWNER, BONNIE CAFE



"We decided to put on there that we didn't want any backlash or negativity, we just wanted everybody's opinions, because everybody has their right to their own opinion of our businesses," Melissa said. "Because the first time that we did this way back when we had the first loophole, everybody was very negative. Everybody was saying don't do it, it's a risk. So we took that, we stepped back said OK we are not going to open, we are going to let it go. Now this time we had everybody positive 100 percent behind us."

According to Governor J.B. Pritzker's executive order, businesses located in airports, hospitals and dining halls in colleges and universities are exempt from the requirements of the executive order that prohibits on-premises consumption.

Brian said that the plan is to have tables six feet apart, no buffet, nothing will be on the tables, servers and employees will wear masks and customers will have a choice of what plating they prefer. The Mount Vernon Bonnie Cafe location has not been open since mid March, its other locations in Bonnie, Centralia, Nashville and West Frankfort have to abide by the executive order, because they are not located inside an airport and are currently only accepting carryouts.

"We are looking at probably July before any of these restaurants get to open, that is a lot for us," Melissa said. "We have 107 to 110 employees and some of these people have not even received one check, one dime, but they are coming to us saying we need help."

Board commissioner Gary Chesney credited the Hubbards for having the right to remain open, but choosing to close in the early days of the pandemic.

"You chose to step back and watch, but you have that right to be open," Chesney said. "Everything I have heard has been positive. As you have already stated if they don't feel comfortable coming in they don't have to come."

Board commissioner Mike Ancona recognized that the Hubbards' willingness to come before the board and tell them about

their plan.

"You guys don't even have to be here and you took it upon yourself to approach this board and that requires

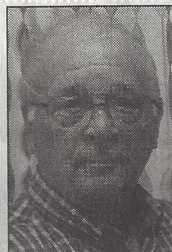
a lot of gumption, a lot of respect and I respect you for doing that," Ancona said. "Because all we do is lease the space to you and if you guys wanted to open or not open it, you could do whatever you wanted down there and we couldn't say a thing to you. That kind of character you just can't speak loudly enough about it."

Board commissioner Ryan Wellmaker also said that he was in support of the restaurant opening back up.

"It definitely has my blessing as long as the proper social distancing and the sanitization are in place," Wellmaker said.

Airport Director Chris Collins read a statement supporting the difficult decision by the Hubbard family and the employees of the Bonnie Cafe. He said the Airport Authority respects Governor Pritzker, appreciates his leadership and noted that the Bonnie Cafe closed down for the safety of the public even when they did not have to.

"The Hubbards have done much due diligence with their approach to re-open, have created a plan that includes multiple steps to keep their customers safe and have promised to complete additional



Mike Ancona



Chris Collins

cleaning of all public areas each day," Collins said. "We understand some will be worried that social distancing, hand washing and additional cleaning may not be enough. Those worried should allow their neighbors the freedom to choose whether or not to patronize the restaurant. The MVAA is standing with the Bonnie Cafe ready to welcome customers back to the Koziara Terminal."

Brian Hubbard said that they have spoken with the Jefferson County Health Department on guidelines for the restaurant. He said that the Bonnie Cafe was on track to have a good first year at the airport, but the COVID-19 pandemic has yanked that away. He said that those at risk should be protected, but said that as a business owner he could not stand seeing his employees having to sell their own personal possessions to make ends meet.

"The toughest decision I have ever had to make in business is right now. I don't want to defy a governor's order, I don't want to go against anybody," Brian said. "We are just here to run a restaurant, make a living for me and my kids."

The Hubbards explained that the reason behind the June 1 opening is in order to make sure all precautions are taken and also make sure they have proper staffing, since some employees are making more on unemployment right now. For more information people may visit the restaurant's social media page.

5-17-20
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