



Shaena Muldoon
Palisades Restaurant

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Location: Remote Interview (Eggleton, VA)

Interviewer: Jessica Taylor

Transcription: Prodocs

Length: Twenty-four minutes

Project: COVID-19 Foodways Oral History Project Phase II

[00:00:00]

Shaena M: Can you hear me?

[00:00:01]

Jessica T: Yes, I can. It will just take me a second to get started out. This is Jessica Taylor and Shaena Muldoon. It is May 29, 2021, almost a year after we last spoke and we're here to do the follow up interview for COVID-19 collection for the Virginia mountains. So, can you talk about how things have evolved since the vaccine has come out?

[00:00:32]

Shaena M: Well, yeah. We started slowly seeing people come back. But it's really just been in the past week where you've really seen everybody come back, I guess since the CDC lifted the mask mandates if you're vaccinated. So, the past few days have really felt like summer's back. It's been the first time in like two years we've had—it's now strange to say two years, but really last summer was a bust. So, it's been two years since we've had a normal summer. So, it's kind of interesting to see everybody back in full swing and everybody's excited to be back. Yeah, it's great.

[00:01:13]

Jessica T: Oh, that's wonderful. Can you talk about how—I'm echoing here for some reason. Can you talk about how things have changed for your employees over the last six or eight months, really over the holidays as well?

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Shaena M: What do you mean changed?

[00:01:37]

Jessica T: So, we had the stimulus checks come out—

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Shaena M: Oh, I see—

[00:01:41]

Jessica T: Yeah, and then lots of movement [laughs] around what's around and what's not.

[00:01:48]

Shaena M: I don't know, for us nothing's really changed. I mean, I still have the same people. Yeah, so I don't know, like, really on that front nothing's changed. Now, if I were to go try and hire people today, that's probably a change. I mean not really, not for me. For the rest of the world, it is, but I'm used to not being able to hire anybody and not seeing anybody because it's always been—I've had difficulty the past three or four years hiring, so that's nothing new for me at Palisades. But anyway, I don't know. I don't think it—what my staff does with their money that

they've gotten from the stimulus, I have no idea and hasn't really affected their job performances
so—

[00:02:36]

Jessica T: Okay, great.

[00:02:37]

Shaena M: I don't know, I don't know how to answer that.

[00:02:39]

Jessica T: No, that's totally fine. I wanted to ask about the vaccines. You guys all got them together,
right? Do I remember that—

[00:02:47]

Shaena M: We got the first one together. The second ones we all had to do individually 'cause I was
worried that—the mass vaccinations were mostly on Thursdays, and I was concerned that they
were going to—we're all going to be sick or we'd be out the whole weekend or something so we
went and got them all individually and separate.

[00:03:07]

Jessica T: Okay.

[00:03:08]

Shaena M: The second one we did.

[00:03:11]

Jessica T: Can you talk about the day that you got the vaccine altogether?

[00:03:16]

Shaena M: Oh yeah, it was just fun. I mean, well, there's nothing fun about getting the vaccine but it was just kinda fun to do it as a team. And everybody was excited to get it finished, so we all felt a little bit of liberation when we got that vaccine.

[00:03:31]

Jessica T: Where did you go to get it?

[00:03:34]

Shaena M: We go to Blacksburg High School.

[00:03:36]

Jessica T: Okay. You had also rolled out a food truck, right, that was somewhat new?

[00:03:43]

Shaena M: Not really a food truck but we're doing pop-ups in Blacksburg. We call it pop-up, not a food truck 'cause we don't physically have a truck. We have to make the food here and we have to cook it here, have it ordered prior to, and then we go and wait for everybody to show up at the

parking lot, drive through, and pick it up. So, we're sort of calling it a pop-up, drive through. But you do have to pre-order which kinda takes the fun away from that, but we still make them drive up and pay the amount ahead of time.

[00:04:17]

Jessica T: Has that process been useful for drumming up business outside of the main store front?

[00:04:24]

Shaena M: Well yeah, I feel like a lot of people are excited about—you know, a lot of people weren't able, or didn't feel comfortable leaving their houses and coming to a restaurant. So, I feel like it gave them an opportunity to still support us and still get food that they wanted but didn't feel comfortable going to sit inside. So that gave options that they didn't have before.

[00:04:50]

Jessica T: Did the menu change, what you all were serving for the pop-up specifically?

[00:04:58]

Shaena M: I'm sorry, can you say that again? There's a train going by so I'm like, I didn't hear what you said.

[00:05:06]

Jessica T: How is the food different for the pop-up than for in the main building?

[00:05:12]

Shaena M: Well, we made sandwiches and more luncheon-type things. We still put our same spin on it, but it's probably not piping hot. But we did our best at having it as eat-ready as possible.

[00:05:32]

Jessica T: You all have innovated so much just generally over the course of COVID. Has anything changed on your menu, especially for the holidays, that you're really proud of or would want to talk about?

[00:05:49]

Shaena M: Well, I feel like we're always trying to be innovative and different. That hasn't changed during the pandemic. That part hasn't changed and we're still trying those kind of things. The only thing that's really changed for us during the pandemic is our hours. What do we do with brunch, do we bring it back, do we not bring it back? Those kind of things. But other than that, I feel like we still give people the same quality food we did before and do our best to have them have a good experience when they do come. I don't know if that's—

[00:06:29]

Jessica T: No, that's fine. I was just trying to get you to talk about a specific dish that you maybe enjoy making.

[00:06:39]

Shaena M: Oh, well, let's see. I don't know, I don't make much of them anymore myself. But I don't know. Our trout is pretty good with popcorn crust and the blackberries, that's been a very popular hit. I don't know. Our fire-roasted peach and rhubarb cheesecake is also pretty good. I mean, it's all good, but I don't know. Those are just a couple things.

[00:07:10]

Jessica T: Yeah, that's great and I remember that cheesecake being pretty exceptional.

[00:07:17]

Shaena M: Yeah, we think the cheesecake is pretty good. And we always come up with different flavors for it as well, that are a little bit different, not just your plain cheesecake. Not that there's anything wrong with plain cheesecake but we like to do a little bit different.

[00:07:31]

Jessica T: Speaking of different, you also hired a sommelier, right? Or a new manager that knows a lot about wine?

[00:07:39]

Shaena M: Yes, we did hire Igor. He's from originally from Ukraine but he's been in Italy for fourteen years at four- and five-star hotels. So, he's a big addition for us. It's great to have someone with all that experience. He's getting used to be—he's only been in the United States for about two months now, so he's been with us for about a month. So, he's getting used to it all here and he's doing a great job, so we're happy to have him. But he'll be doing some changes pretty soon.

We're also gonna finally have that bar that we've always wanted and our application's in process now. So, he'll be a great help with that as well.

[00:08:20]

Jessica T: Oh, that's amazing. Will the menu be changing a great deal over the next couple months?

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Shaena M: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

[00:08:32]

Jessica T: Yeah, how will he change the menu over the next few months?

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Shaena M: Good question. Well, I mean, he has a bunch of good ideas for drinks we can add to the menu once we get our approval for our liquor license. When we do wine tastings and stuff, he has been picking out what he likes, and thinks will sell well. So, that's good. That's always a good thing. If they're excited about it, then it's easy to sell it.

[00:09:01]

Jessica T: Definitely. You have also reopened the store that's attached to Palisades, right?

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Shaena M: Finally. Yes, we opened it about three weeks ago, yep.

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Jessica T: Can you talk about that process, like what's been going on, and what kind of vendors and stuff you have in there right now?

[00:09:22]

Shaena M: Yeah, well, the store is kinda unique 'cause it really features only local artists and everything is handcrafted. And all the artists are from the New River Valley, so it's kind of nice to have an outlet that's just that. So, we don't sell anything else in there. You won't find something, I don't know, from China or whatever in this shop. Its only handcrafted items that we have in there. And it's been great to finally open it back up. Obviously, the main drive out here is the restaurant, so that's a satellite kind of scenario. So that's why it took so long to get it back open, because if people aren't fully coming back to the restaurant they aren't going to go to the store. So, I'm excited that they finally have it open and we have a lot of great artistic things for people to purchase.

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Jessica T: You also have been sourcing locally. How has that conversation—how has that relationship rather changed over the last six or eight months? With the trout for example. And the eggs. And the coffee.

[00:10:49]

Shaena M: And the coffee, all that. Well, nothing—fortunately, I feel like the people locally handled the pandemic a lot better than the national brands because they are smaller and more do-or-die, which is exactly why I had to stay open. So, we never had any distribution problems with the locals in our area. It's all been more with the bigger companies that we've had issues with getting product, but all of my locals like the beef from Rosetta Farms, the coffee from Dark Hollow, the trout that's been consistent and not a problem at all, thank God. It's been nice to have some consistency. But there's other things that have been difficult to get. But not locally, not the local people.

[00:11:37]

Jessica T: What's been difficult to get?

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Shaena M: A lot of the beer and wines and then sometimes there'll be—like a couple of weeks ago, beef was actually hard to get. We ended up getting some, but it was- I don't know it was kinda odd. Same with the pork, everybody's in the panic mode, like the gasoline thing. So, everybody's like, "Oh no, we're gonna have a shortage." So, I don't know if there's just a run on things or if it's just that—supposedly the slaughterhouses are having problems with people coming to work. I mean, that's what I hear. I'm not really sure that's what the case is, but whatever it is, distribution has been an issue. And we've been having a really hard time getting some of the wines and beers that we carry all the time also. I think with the pandemic finally being over, the glitches are beginning to happen a little bit and it's been harder for them to keep up with our

demand. So, I'm not really sure what part of the process is stopping that, but hopefully it'll work itself out the next couple months. I hope.

[00:12:52]

Jessica T: How do you adjust when that happens?

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Shaena M: Well, I mean, obviously with the wine you just gotta suggest something else and say, "Sorry, can't get it." But when it's the beef or something that is a staple, it becomes a little bit more difficult. So, you kinda hope that you create a win or something that they're gonna like, and they forget about the fact that you may not have something else. So that's what you kind of hope for. So also, sometimes I will also sometimes order more than I need just in case, so that I don't run out [laughs]. When you start hearing those little rumors, you can't help but be like, "Okay, order two ribeyes this week, order five cases of bacon this week." It depends on what you have going on. But you try to do a little bit of that too, so you're not completely in trouble. But when you are, you just have to be prepared to guide them in a different direction.

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Jessica T: Understand. What was the reaction of the reopening by patrons? What was the kind of feedback you were getting from people walking through the door over the last couple months summer starts?

[00:14:18]

Shaena M: Okay, wait. I didn't get the first part of that. What was the reaction for people what—

[00:14:21]

Jessica T: Of patrons as things start to open up?

[00:14:26]

Shaena M: Oh, yeah, everybody's been very excited. I mean, everybody's just been very excited to be back out. I mean, like last night, we had probably about—I don't know, I'd say probably six to eight tables that this is the first time they've been in a restaurant for fourteen months. So, they were so excited, and it was just so exciting to see everybody. You forget that you haven't seen these people in almost a year and a half which sounds crazy but then—everybody's just getting back to their normal life and they're very, very excited about it. And we're very excited to see them, you know. So, some people, it's been a long time since we've seen them. So, it's great to see people in person without a mask [laughs].

[00:15:16]

Jessica T: One thing I wanted to ask—you did Christmas [tea] over the holidays right?

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Shaena M: Yes, um-hm. Yes.

[00:15:25]

Jessica T: What was that experience like, hosting an event like that at really the height of the pandemic?

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Shaena M: Well, ironically, that was the only thing that saved me this past year because people were not coming for Christmas parties. They weren't really coming to dinner, but everybody showed up for the teas. So, I was like, "what, okay." So, we actually were fully booked for all the teas just like a normal time, but the dining room was very slow. So honestly, the teas saved me this year. It was very odd to have—the teas are always very popular, but December's usually a very busy month in the restaurant in general. So, it was very interesting to see how that played out, that people were still not sure about COVID but they were willing to come for the teas. So, I was like, "okay."

[00:16:22]

Jessica T: What was that like for everyone there that [indiscernible] fully masked?

[00:16:29]

Shaena M: Yeah, well, I don't know. We didn't—as a restaurant, we were fully masked for pretty much fourteen months, so it was normal everyday stuff for us. Having people—I feel like my situation's a little unique in that when he said, "separation," all of my tables—I just moved the tables I had upstairs. I had an upstairs. Most people didn't have an upstairs. I'm one of the fortunate ones that could, if people showed up, keep my hundred percent capacity while following all the guidelines, because I have two floors. And so, it was pretty much business as usual since he let us open back up at the end of last year's June. So, we had been running two floors like that and that's just how we did the teas. Also, everybody was spread out, tables were

everywhere and we didn't—I mean, yeah, everybody was just spread out and normal. I don't know. We were so used to doing it with the masks on that, I mean, it's just been two weeks since we hadn't had to wear the mask. Which has been great, I gotta say. Once he let us not wear the masks, I was all about not wearing it. It's a lot easier to run up and down steps without it, I'll tell you that.

[00:18:07]

Jessica T: When do you want to start hosting events again?

[00:18:14]

Shaena M: Well, I'm not sure. We've been doing a whole bunch of different events off-premise. We're still doing off-premise events, but we haven't been doing many in-house events. So, I'm gonna keep the dining room as is with two floors. And so, I'm not sure what that does for in-house events. We'll see. It's still up for debate how we're gonna handle that, but right now we're keeping the floor separate and giving everybody a little more space. I think people are ready to take off the masks, but I don't know if we're really ready to be that up-close and personal with everybody. So, I think we'll keep that distance.

[00:19:02]

Jessica T: Absolutely. One of the **[indiscernible]** is what do you look forward to this summer in terms of things that are going on in-house or things that you guys are doing in the community?

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Shaena M: We are going to change our Sundays from 12 to 8 and make it like, “Sundays are fun days at the Palisades” and have music come back. And we’ll have music from 1 to 3 and then we’ll have music from 5 to either 8 or 8:30. So that’ll be our first step back towards music. So, I’m excited about that ‘cause it’s been a long time since we’ve had music, and everybody asks me every day when are we bringing back music. So, it’s not that simple, because you have to pay them and then you have to pay them in food and money. So, restaurants are still not quite 100% back on their feet so you’re struggling to figure out how you bring back something that you’ve had for a while without going backwards again. But that’s what we decided to do, is give it a whirl with the Sundays. And then people want us to bring brunch back, but I don’t think that’s ever gonna happen. So that’s what we thought we’d do, a compromise, and do 12 to 8. And then we’ll have breakfast items on that menu, so we’ll see how that works. It starts July 11, so we’ll see.

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Jessica T: What kind of music is coming back first?

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Shaena M: Good question. I wanted the Irish band to play Sunday night but they’re getting married day so that’s not gonna happen. He was trying—he thought he was like, “We could do it, we could get married and do that.” And they’re all looking at me and I’m like, “Ugh, I’m not gonna be the one in trouble for that.” So, I don’t know who’s gonna be the first musicians back, but I think Bobby Parker will do the 1 to 3 and then we’re trying to figure out who’s gonna do the night shift. But the Irish band will do the next weekend after their wedding. But yeah, it’ll be more like singular for the 1 to 3 and the bands from 5 to 8:30, so I think they’ll bring a nice vibe back.

[00:21:27

Jessica T: Are you anticipating tourism rising up again after last summer?

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Shaena M: Am I anticipating what?

[00:21:33]

Jessica T: Tourism, more tourism.

[00:21:35]

Shaena M: Oh yeah, it's already back. I mean, the amount of people we've had this week, I literally was like, "Wow, this is how it used to be." So, it was great and I'm hoping that continues all the way to the summer.

[00:21:51]

Jessica T: Awesome, well is there anything we haven't talked about, about your COVID experience that we should?

[00:22:03]

Shaena M: I don't know. Like everybody, I'm just thrilled that it's heading in the right direction and that we're almost done with all this and won't want to do it again. It definitely was a time to reflect and that's why—I think it is an opportunity for everybody to figure out what they want to

do going forward. Do they want to keep the business as it was? Do they want to make some changes? 'Cause if you're gonna make changes, now is the perfect time to do that.

[00:22:31]

Jessica T: Did you have any moments like that?

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Shaena M: What where we should make changes or—

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Jessica T: Mh-hm.

[00:22:40]

Shaena M: Well, I think the Sunday thing is the biggest thing, the brunch, 'cause we've had brunch for eleven and a half years until COVID shut it down. That's the one thing people are gonna miss the most, but I think it's time to come up with something new and that's why—that's probably the biggest decision I made going out of here, deciding things like that. And we may not do as many events upstairs as we did in the past either, because restaurant life isn't easy, and I just need it to be a little bit easier now. So, until everybody's back on their feet, make it a little bit easier.

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Jessica T: Well, wonderful.

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Shaena M: So yeah, I'm basically glad it's over as is everybody though.

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Jessica T: Well, thank you so much for taking time.

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Shaena M: Thank you, I appreciate it.