

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021



Kristie Abney
Full Plate Real Estate
Atlanta, GA

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Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
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Diana Dombrowski: Okay. Today is Friday, July 30th [2021]. This is Diana Dombrowski recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance COVID-19 Project. We're here today with Kristie Abney.

Kristie, thank you so much for being here.

[00:00:14]

Kristie Abney: Oh, my pleasure.

[00:00:16]

Diana Dombrowski: And we're going to talk today as a follow-up to our initial COVID-19 interview. We talked in December. We're going to speak about a couple changes that have taken place. In December, we were discussing how your business and how your work had been impacted by the pandemic and by different safety and health restrictions. So we're talking today in this world where vaccinations are available, but they haven't been adopted by, I would say, the majority of Georgians, from what I understand.

[00:00:54]

Kristie Abney: [glitch in recording]

[00:00:57]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, and we just got some updated guidance from the CDC this week, as well, speaking about a new variant that's come in. So, we're by no means at the end of this pandemic, but we have reached a significant milestone in the vaccination

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

being available. And so, I'm curious, if you could, talk us through some of the changes that have taken place for your business right now.

[00:01:26]

Kristie Abney: Sure. So, I was vaccinated back in January, and yay! And I wish all my fellow Georgians who are eligible would have done the same, because I do feel like—I feel like we're in another wave of this, this time completely of our own doing. I mean, you know, initially, a virus is a natural thing. It's a scientific phenomenon. They happen. We had to work at record speed to get these numerous highly effective vaccines to market.

And I feel like, you know, not to go way off on a political thing—but I will, because that's what I do—but I do feel like, unfortunately, if COVID had happened and a vaccine had come out with a different administration in place, I don't feel like it would have been politicized to the extent that it was. Perhaps I'm being naïve, because I do think we still have a lot of hardcore Republican governors, including Georgia's own Brian Kemp, who still seem to be in some sort of denial and belief that all of this is about infringing on people's personal rights, which we all know that's not what this is about, but that's what it's turned into, and, unfortunately, I feel like the first horror show of this, you know, basically from March of 2020 through let's call it December of 2020, we were in a disaster that was nature's making, and I feel like since then, we are in another disaster that is 100 percent of man's making, which I think is far more frustrating, because it just doesn't feel like we should be moving backwards, which is exactly what's happening.

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

And I think, you know, I feel like from the last time we talked, I feel like things have gotten way, way, way, way better and then now they're kind of getting worse again, and I'm feeling I think there was a lot of optimism in the springtime, that people were getting vaccinated, we have a new president, things are really looking up, and from the restaurateurs' perspective, I think I can speak for my clients and say every one of them blown away by how quickly people came back and were so excited to fill restaurants again and go out to eat, and that's still the case. That hasn't diminished. I think everyone, to a person, that I know, has been thrilled with how quickly their businesses rebounded.

Of course, one of the things that nobody saw coming was that the biggest constraint to restaurants coming back would really be staffing and the lack of available people who want to work in restaurants. I do think that even that's starting to straighten itself out. You know, one of the benefits of a free market economy is that supply and demand at the end of the day are going to be what determine where people want to work and if they want to come back to work, and I think a lot of even fast food restaurants are realizing if they want employees, they've going to have to pay them better. These people in the restaurant world are incredibly hardworking, they put themselves at a lot of risk every single day being at the front line and being in close proximity and breathing the same air of a lot of people who they don't know whether they're vaccinated or not.

Right now, those of us who have been vaccinated have a little paper card [glitch in recording]. I mean, I could recreate that on my own. I could make something that looks so much more official than the little CVS Pfizer thing I have, where somebody literally wrote a date and then they got the date wrong on the second one, scratched through it,

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

wrote a new date, put their initials on there. I mean, it's so counterfeitable, it's not even funny.

But, anyway, so I think that the staffing situation is working itself out just in time for we—you know, the mayor of Atlanta has come out with mask mandates again, which, of course, our governor is fighting her on and saying, “Mask mandates are not legal and they're not enforceable, and we have such a huge crime problem in Atlanta, how are we going to police masking when we can't even police murders?” I mean, it's this, like, ridiculous, crazy argument that the people who are in charge and are enforcing rules about masks are the same people who are keeping murderers in jail. It's preposterous and everybody knows it, but it's the politicization all over again of masks and of vaccinations.

So here we go again. We're entering late summer. Soon we're going to be back into the fall. Everybody's going back to school. It is really like déjà vu as to this time last year. Are kids going to go back to school? And are restaurants going to start getting restrictive again as to who can eat inside, or is everybody going to be eating outside? I don't know. I think people are—I would characterize the mood of the people that I deal with on a daily basis about COVID right now as being optimistic, yet incredibly frustrated, in a long-winded nutshell.

[00:07:06]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, not long-winded at all. Incredibly—I mean, you've touched on just about everything. [Laughter] I'd love to talk about some of that in a little more detail, because when we think about your clients who are trying to make plans for the future, even the short-term future, maybe six months or a year from now, when we were

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

talking in December, you had some folks who were talking about the type of building they were looking at, you know, that could be accommodating and a little more flexible of these mandates, and some, I believe, that had pushed their opening altogether. So what has happened with some of those clients? Have those restaurants opened? Are you continuing to push? What's the timeline looking for them?

[00:07:18]

Kristie Abney: Everybody is moving forward, I would say, as quickly as they can. Another part of the interesting dynamic of the world reopening is not only are there staffing issues and not enough people to work, also just supply-side issues in general with construction materials, you know, steel and lumber and—so everything from a construction standpoint to build out restaurants has slowed down, has slowed the process down.

Also, I would say that it doesn't just apply to, like, servers in restaurants and cooks in restaurants that are shorthanded. It's architects and inspectors and engineers and all the other people whose work comes in on the front end to get a restaurant open, all of those people are stretched way thin, and there aren't enough of them to go around, so that's slowed the process too. But I would say no one is like—in December, I feel like a lot of people were like, “I'm gonna kind of sit back for a hot minute and see sort of what the spring—.” I think when we talked in December, it was like, you know, “The vaccine is here, but we don't know who's going to get it yet, so let's just wait and kind of push and see what happens in the springtime.”

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Now I think everybody is kind of all systems go, but everybody's being artificially slowed down, if you will, by supply-side issues, staffing issues, all of that, because it's kind of like, I mean, it's a little bit like, you know, hundreds of thousands of restaurants all having a grand opening at the same time when everybody was trying to reopen in the spring, and all competing for the same talent. There were a lot of people that just left the business altogether, that left the restaurant business, you know, never to return.

So, I think all that's getting figured out, and I feel like everybody is eager to open the restaurants that they had in the works, and everybody that I work with has reopened. Nobody really closed, but they've all reopened back to what they were pre-pandemic. And I'm hearing from really across the board, everybody's sales, if they're at pre-pandemic levels, they're rapidly approaching it, and most of them have passed what they were doing pre-COVID. So not only have people figured it out, but they're thriving.

[00:10:44]

Diana Dombrowski: Wow! It's a stunning turnaround, considering—

[00:10:48]

Kristie Abney: [glitch in recording]

[00:10:47]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, and in the midst of that, you know, from what I remember at the beginning of the pandemic, a lot of the guidance was changing frequently, maybe on

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

a week-to-week or monthly sort of basis, maybe even daily, and now at the beginning of the summer, we got the kind of all-clear to begin indoor dining again in a lot of places, but it was up to people to interpret something that I think was a little bit vague, and, again, each restaurant had to make a decision for themselves about how this was going to be interpreted and what the safest thing to do was like. Were you working with any of your clients during that time, and what was it like to get that mandate around the early summer or the late spring?

[00:11:40]

Kristie Abney: And I would say that, I mean, they don't—I mean, mostly I—you know, it's conversations with friends as opposed to being necessarily, like, their go-to for just trying to figure out their plan. It was more just kind of listening in on the conversation and being a sounding board as a customer, you know, listening to what they were going through, and I think that, yes, I think that there was a good bit of confusion in the beginning. Everybody reopened only to—I mean, it feels like almost the minute that everybody was, like, reopened indoor dining, masks are up to you, or, you know, a lot of places have signs on the doors that say "If you're fully vaccinated, you don't need to wear a mask," or "Wearing a mask is up to you. If you're not fully vaccinated, please wear a mask." Of course, that's 100 percent relying on, you know, people's integrity.

And, unfortunately, I feel like a lot of the people who—again, I'm going to get a little political, but the people who aren't vaccinated are also the same people who I wouldn't trust to say to wear a mask, because they're not vaccinated. I think, you know, they're all about their rights and their freedoms as Americans, and they don't have to do

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

what anybody tells them to do, and they don't have to tell anybody what they're doing or whether they've put a vaccine in their body, it's up to them and not up to anybody else.

So, I feel right as everybody was sort of getting to a place where they were comfortable with where we were, now all of a sudden, we have a mask mandate in the city of Atlanta. For anything indoors, you're supposed to wear a mask. We have a governor telling our mayor, "You've overstepped your bounds. You can't tell people." So yet again, in Atlanta the restauranteurs are being put smack dab in the middle of a political fight.

I know I was just reading online this morning Fox Brothers barbeque—they're not a client of mine, but they're a barbecue restaurant—and, you know, a lot of barbecue restaurants tend to attract a more kind of rural and blue-collar clientele, a lot of whom, at least in the South, tend to skew a little bit more right. And Fox Bros. came out and said, "Unless you're fully vaccinated and produce a card that says you're fully vaccinated, you're not welcome in our restaurants." And it has, I mean, opened up a firestorm on social media, and people are going crazy, you know. I mean, a lot of the stuff that I read, because my news tends to be picked for me [laughs] and they know what I want to read, a lot of people are very, very supportive of it, and then a lot of people are calling for like a, you know, forever boycott of the restaurants, and it's not a restaurant's place to tell people what they should be doing medically.

It's just—I fear that we're going into the late summer and early fall in a *worse* place than we were last year in terms of the bifurcation of the vaccinated camp and the non-vaccinated camp. Interestingly, I sort of feel like science is going to sort this out. The virus is going to sort this out, because [glitch in recording] is wildly contagious and it's

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

very cruel to the unvaccinated, and not a big deal, it seems like, for the most part, if you are vaccinated. So we're about to see it play out in real time, like how your stance on being vaccinated, especially if you live in a big urban area and you do things like go out to eat and you participate in things where there are crowds, to me it's really interesting to see how this spreads and how it impacts the two camps.

[00:15:43]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, none of it looks good. None of it—I mean, no. I wonder, speaking a little bit outside of your business and just as a customer going around to different restaurants and living in the world, what has it been like for you to negotiate the boundaries of other people or maybe, like, need to guess who's vaccinated, that they're wearing a mask, and how safe you feel, what was that process like as we started coming out of this a little bit?

[00:16:12]

Kristie Abney: Well, interestingly, my husband I didn't do anything. We didn't travel at all. We didn't do anything from March of 2020 until May of 2021, and May of 2021, we sort of very delicately started dipping our toes back in the water, both going out to eat on a regular basis in Atlanta, but also traveling again. We went to New York, and, interestingly, we were in New York when they did away with indoor mask requirements and they reopened for indoor dining. Then we were in San Francisco when they—at the time, I mean, it was just random luck, it wasn't any planning on our part, but when the same thing happened in California and they reopened California for indoor dining. So it's

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

interesting that we were in other major metropolitan areas when they released their mask mandates.

I would say that in other cities much more so than in Atlanta, people, even when they were told you don't have to wear masks inside anymore, everybody still was. In Atlanta, it's like when they said you don't have to wear masks inside anymore, I mean, literally I think the entire city just threw their masks away and we didn't wear masks at all anymore, present company included. It just felt like it's okay to do that.

I think it's funny. I feel like for me personally, I tend to kind of do what the people around me are doing. Like, I feel like if I'm somewhere and everybody has on masks, I feel weird without my mask on. And certainly, in any type of medical environment or public transit environment, you know, definitely masks on, but at, like, Whole Foods or just my sort of day-to-day life, I felt like we got rid of masks, and now I'm wanting it back on again as quickly as I got rid of it. It just feels like if you're going to be breathing the air of other people and you don't know what their position is on things, wear a mask. And for the most part, every restaurant that we go to in every city, including Atlanta, all of the employees of the restaurants are still wearing masks, so, you know, I assume that's mandated by the restaurant and not just personal choice, because it seems like every single person in the restaurants that we go to, in terms of employees, are all wearing masks.

So, I don't know. I mean, I realize that's a wishy-washy answer, because I kind of don't really know the answer. I've not gone anywhere where I've not felt safe, but I think that's because I only go to places where I feel pretty safe. Where I live in Atlanta and the places that I go are not particularly crowded.

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

And I live I Midtown in Atlanta, which is definitely left-leaning. Everybody that I—pretty much everybody that I know is vaccinated, you know. I have some distant family members that I don't see very often, that, you know, are not, and I would not be around anybody unvaccinated right now if I knew that they were not vaccinated. I certainly wouldn't have anybody in my home, certainly wouldn't dine at a restaurant with them. I know they exist, but I try to stay away from them.

[00:19:45]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah! And the difference between California and how things are going in the Southeast is wildly different, because I was there at the same time, around mid-June when everything was opening, and then finally, a few weeks later, got to go home to Florida for the first time since the pandemic had started, and it was like going into a world where the pandemic didn't exist. [laughs] Because nothing was happening to prevent anybody from getting it anywhere, as opposed to California, where some restaurants were too concerned to even open up indoor dining again once it was possible, you know. They were still too cautious to do that. You know, I really remember not wanting to seem to anyone else around me that I was an anti-masker and anti-vaxxer, so, you know, I was just going to do as the Romans do and wear the mask everywhere, and, you know, knowing I probably didn't need it, but, you know, it— [laughs] I remember feeling the way you did. I didn't think that I was so influenced by other people.

[00:20:56]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Kristie Abney: Me either. No, I completely feel like I am a little bit back in high school again, and it's kind of like peer pressure, like if everybody else has a mask on, I have my mask on. I mean, in New York, even just, you know, like walking down even outside and walking down the street when we were there—we've been twice to New York. When we were there in May, everybody had masks on everywhere. We were just there this time last week, and outside, for the most part, nobody was wearing masks. Inside, fifty-fifty wearing masks versus not wearing masks.

And it's funny, it's like how the politicization of the American flag, like now if you see somebody with one of those little tiny American flag pins, you're like "For sure a Republican Trumper," you know. Like, how did the American flag become a sign that you're a Republican Trumper? I mean, that shouldn't be. And it's like with a mask, you sort of feel like if you're waltzing into a place without a mask on and everybody else has one on, you feel like people are looking at you like, "Ugh, she's one of those," especially if you have a southern accent. It's like, "Ah! She for sure is carrying the Delta variant."
[laughter] [glitch in recording]

[00:22:12]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, it's true! Do you often have to negotiate that with clients or are you doing like a combo of virtual or onsite meetings right now?

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Kristie Abney: Pretty much everything is in-person right now, you know, I mean, or if it's not, it's more just a function of logistics and not concern for safety. But, you know, I

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

mean, I think—I mean, I still do—you know, one of the other things I still—people are still not shaking hands. I mean, that’s one of the things I have noticed, like the elbow bump or the fist bump or, you know, that. The hugging of clients when you see them again, definitely not the norm.

I think people are definitely aware of personal space and not getting probably as close as you once would. I mean, I used to think nothing of throwing a couple of people in my car to go drive around. There hasn’t been any discussion of that, but it’s like everybody just gets in separate cars now if we’re driving around to look at locations and stuff. I don’t want three people in my car, and I don’t think those people want to be in the same—again, I mean, I think everybody’s real sensitive to very close personal space, and I feel like that’s sort of where we are right now, is that kind of seems to sort of be the line. Like, in-person meetings are definitely happening, but at a comfortable—you know, certainly at an arm’s-length distance.

You know, I just heard from a client of mine this morning, who was telling me that his general manager, as of this morning, has been hospitalized. He’s fully vaccinated. He’s been hospitalized with COVID-related pneumonia. And this is an early-forties person who is in otherwise great health. So, I think we’re at a really fragile spot, because things change so rapidly.

What we’re hearing is if you’re fully vaccinated and you get it, which there are breakthrough cases happening more and more, that your case is going to be minor, but I think we’re starting to hear now that, you know, not necessarily. I mean, there are people who are having breakthrough cases who, just like the first go-round, it’s unpredictable who’s going to just kind of, you know, have basically a bad cold versus who’s going to

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

get really, really sick. I think we're going to find that with the breakthrough cases, too, that hopefully most of the people who are vaccinated are going to have, if they get it, they're going to get a very mild case of it, but I have a feeling that as more and more and more people get it who are vaccinated, hopefully the proportions are different, but [glitch in recording] Delta variant and get really sick, which is horrible, because that virus is just going to keep going around and mutating, and there will be more and more variants as long as we are not at herd immunity. Until everybody has had it, has gotten vaccinated for it, or has gotten killed by it, you know, I mean, we're going to kind of be, I think, in this rut for a while.

I'm hopeful about the booster. I mean, Pfizer said, you know, they've got an effective booster. The CDC has said nobody needs a booster yet. I, for one, would drive to the drugstore right now and get a booster if they said I could. I even was joking with a friend of mine this morning—it's not a very funny joke, but saying, like, I've even thought, like, I wonder if you went to a drugstore and pretended you had never been vaccinated, could you get revaccinated? Would that, like, maybe belt-and-suspenders you a little bit, you know? Like maybe your body makes a few more antibodies to help against this variant or the next variant? Who knows?

[00:26:17]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, yeah. Drive across state lines. I know I spoke to a farmer from Georgia before, because farmers in that state weren't considered essential workers like they were in other places like Alabama, so they drove across the state line to a Walmart in Alabama and got the whole farm team vaccinated that way. So who knows? I

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

mean, at this point, it seems like [sighs] [laughs] I remember when I got it, I really had to travel to find a clinic where I could even schedule it, you know. I really had to drive out to a rural area where they had supplies they were just desperate to give people and get shots in arms. And, you know, it really seems like that's still the case.

So the sense I'm getting from you is that you and your clients have in mind now this different level of flexibility, you know, and it's kind of built in a resilience where whatever comes in the fall, you know, it's probably going to be similar to something you've handled already.

[00:27:28]

Kristie Abney: Exactly.

[00:27:28]

Diana Dombrowski: And, you know, things are going to move forward. They're not going to stop. They're going to move forward, maybe just at a different pace. And I wonder, compared to when this first hit all of our lives in March, looking back now on your expectations or maybe what you imagined as possible scenarios, how does that line up for maybe what you had in mind or were thinking?

[00:27:54]

Kristie Abney: Well, it's so funny, because when I knew we were going to be talking again, I was thinking about it a couple of weeks ago, like had we been able to keep our original appointment from a few weeks ago, I feel like things have changed so much in

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

the two-week delay from when we were going to talk to now, which is really interesting. Like, I almost feel like it's a *really* different conversation today than it would have been just a very short time ago, because if we had talked a month ago, the Delta variant was just sort of this thing that was out there, "Oh, don't worry about it, though, if you're vaccinated. It's just this kind of—." And now it's like bit by bit, it's becoming—it's just COVID all over again, you know. It's not just an anomaly. It is still the same beast we've been trying to wrestle to the ground for the last year and a half.

I would say that I think people know now that, from a restaurant standpoint, that it's survivable, whatever gets thrown at the restaurant community, they're going to survive it, and everybody that's made it this far, the restaurant closures, at least of my clients and the ones in Atlanta that closed, were, in looking back on it, they were ones who already had leases expiring, they were kind of thinking about getting out of the business anyway, their business wasn't going great even before COVID. You know, they could close and save face and sort of pin it on COVID. Everybody's that survived will survive the Delta variant. They'll make it through. I would say everybody feels like it's survivable, but it's exhausting and it's ridiculous that we find ourselves in this spot again.

I think you may see some fallout from maybe like older restauranteurs that are like, "Is this the future? I mean, is this what I'm going to be looking at for the last three or four years of my career in the restaurant business? And if so, I just kind of want no part of it, you know." And I think you might see just fatigue taking some people out of the business, because, you know, we're starting to see—I mean, it's happened in a couple restaurants just in the last week. There's a restaurant, they're not my client, but that I know well, they closed for four days because they had a positive COVID case. There's a

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

brewery client of mine, they just had to close for three days because they had a positive COVID case. So it's down to "All right, we've got to get everybody tested again, and we're not going to reopen until everybody's been tested and we know it's safe for everybody to come back to work again."

So I just think the rolling closures and as much the emotional fatigue of that as any sort of economic hit, I think is going to take a toll. It just can't not take a toll. It takes a toll on me to even talk about it, and I don't experience it. It doesn't hit my wallet. But it's just hard to know what the right thing to do is, I think, if you're in a public-facing business right now.

[00:31:09]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, and, you know, I'm curious to see in the next couple months, depending on how severe this crisis gets among the unvaccinated, whether or not there will be other types of government support like the Paycheck Protection Program if restaurants have to close, that right now you need to absorb 100 percent of that. And, you know, if a bigger crisis happens, like God forbid, you know, customers or whatever catch it, I mean, there's just no liability protection whatsoever, you know. I'm really curious to see if there's anything that comes out of the Biden administration safety-wise, safety and also financial support-wise. That was such a big part of keeping restaurants afloat for a few months, for maybe even a year, you know, depending on what their situation was like. Yeah.

[00:32:08]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Kristie Abney: And the formation of the Independent Restaurant Coalition and then, you know, the PPP program and how that helped a lot of restaurants stay afloat, and then, you know, then some other acts that were put into place to help people, and, you know, some other funds that became available to minority-owned businesses only, and, you know, little sort of specialized things that have come out of it.

I don't know. It will be interesting to see how that all plays out. I think, like, one of the things that's going to come out of it, and it's only just recently started with me, is because I negotiate leases on behalf of the restaurants, not on behalf of the landlord, you know, one of the things that I'm now trying to negotiate into my leases, typically landlords expect restaurants to have certain hours that they're open and they're open *x* number of days out of the week, and, you know, except for nationally recognized holidays, you know, they expect the restaurants to be open. And I'm now trying to get that language really softened in leases to give the restaurants a *lot* more flexibility in terms of being able to close for one week out of the year 100 percent at their discretion and whenever they want, just to combat the fatigue of being a restaurant owner and so they can give all their employees a week off, they can take a week off.

Any restaurant owner will tell you that just because they're not in the restaurant because they're on vacation, if the restaurant is open, they're never not paying attention to what's happening in their restaurant. That's not a true vacation. So the only way they get a true vacation is if the restaurant's actually closed. So I think there will be things like that that are a lingering effect of all this, because they know that, you know, their insurance provision doesn't take care of any of that kind of stuff. The virus is considered

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

an act of God, and most insurance provisions, it's very difficult to insure against an act of God.

I think that the long-term ripple effect of all of this is really yet to be seen, but I think, you know, being in the restaurant brokerage business, I'm trying to, like, look out and think, like, what are the things that will actually be most helpful for restaurants going forward, like built-in vacation, which I would have never even—that would have never entered my mind a year and a half ago.

[00:34:54]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah. It's so funny you mention that, because I just went to the restaurant last night where I used to work, and they shut down. They shut down for seven to ten days just so the employees could get a break, because they were the only ones who hung on the whole time. They were exhausted. They'd lost help in the kitchen. Everyone was, like, beyond their max and had been operating way beyond their max for a long time. I *never* thought I would see that, ever. It just isn't part of the ethos where you show up and you give more than you thought you had, you know, to that [glitch in recording] that day. And, yeah, so I was thrilled for everyone who came back looking healthy [laughs] and happy. It would just be incredible if that were a permanent change that took place as a result of that. Yeah.

[00:35:54]

Kristie Abney: Agreed. I think, you know, paying restaurant people more, you know, for their work, particularly, you know, the front-of-the-house people particularly, and tipping

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

establishments tend to do a lot better than back-of-the-house. That's a conversation for another Zoom another time about the, you know, different restaurants that have tried tip-sharing all that, which has not worked, for the most part.

But it's going to be an interesting thing to see what restaurants do to be able to keep and retain good talent, knowing that we're probably going to be living with variants for a while, I mean, probably at least another year or two, realistically, you know. I mean, as long as you still have a tremendous amount of population that's not going to get vaccinated, the viruses are really smart and they adapt and they, you know, go into the unvaccinated and they morph, and they'll become the next variant, because they're really smart and their sole mission is to survive, and they do that by morphing and moving from human to human to human.

[00:37:12]

Diana Dombrowski: And just a few weeks ago, that wouldn't have been my perspective either, yeah.

[00:37:17]

Kristie Abney: No, no. It's incredible how quickly things have taken a turn for the worse.

[00:37:26]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, yeah, I agree. So those are mainly my questions in the areas that I thought to talk about, but just—

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

[00:37:35]

Kristie Abney: I feel like we need to talk again in, like, ninety more days, because I think this is all—it's going to be really interesting to see where we are truly in the fall, like October, November. There's a great article in today's *New York Times*, which I will send you a link as soon as we hang up the phone. There's a great article that talks about the virus, and it's actually—for *The New York Times*, it's actually kind of, I would say, cautiously optimistic about how there is also a chance—and it happened with the pandemic 100 years ago—where it could just die on its own for not really good reason.

[00:38:17]

Diana Dombrowski: Oh!

[00:38:18]

Kristie Abney: That man can fight it to a point, but that much like—it uses an analogy—like wildfires that sometimes even without man's intervention, they just die themselves out, like for some reason they sort of will hit, you know, a point and they don't spread any further, and that that happens with pandemics and it's happened in history. [laughs]
So, yeah, throw that into the mix.

[00:38:44]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Diana Dombrowski: God, that's so complicated to even think about, because when it comes to saving lives, that would be incredible, and when it comes to the hubris that might build up in people that they're just invincible, you know, that's— [laughs]

[00:39:04]

Kristie Abney: It's concerning.

[00:39:04]

Diana Dombrowski: That would be a wildcard, yeah. That's be a real [glitch in recording].

[00:39:06]

Kristie Abney: I mean, I fully would have expected to read an article like that maybe in *The Wall Street Journal*, but not in *The New York Times*. So I thought that was really interesting, too, is that it's a *New York Times* article that talks about how this could die off on its own. I would love to be having this conversation with you in a few months and us being like, "What the hell? It's all over!" [laughter]

[00:39:33]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, we're just going to pretend like it didn't happen, you know.

[00:39:36]

Kristie Abney: Exactly.

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

[00:39:36]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, that's really interesting. What we're planning for the interviews is to have them—at least this set of two—come online around early 2022, so those first spring months. And I think you know Annemarie Anderson, the oral historian at SFA?

[00:39:53]

Kristie Abney: I don't.

[00:39:54]

Diana Dombrowski: Okay. She's employed full-time to do this work, and if you go to the museum this year or virtually, you'll see her there. So she and I are planning to write something about this, which means the next steps for you are to get the transcript, you'll get a copy of the audio, and I'll stay in touch about different themes that are coming up from everybody, and we'll look towards publishing and bringing things online in the spring. But if we do end up doing that series of [unclear] interviews, I'm glad to know that you're interested, because that's something that I haven't talked about with everybody, but we'd hoped to speak next, once we felt that we were really on the other side of something, and initially, that was the plan, but [laughs] that's not the way anything feels right now. So, yeah.

[00:40:45]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Kristie Abney: Either way, if we take a really positive turn or we take a much darker turn, I do feel like 90 to 120 days from now-ish, I feel like it'll be really interesting, even if you and I just have a personal conversation. I'd love to just chat about "Look at what we thought was happening at the end of July. Look at what we thought was happening at the end of December 2020. Look at what we thought was happening at the end of July of 2021." It's either way better than we hoped or way worse than we hoped or—I don't know. It's fascinating.

[00:41:20]

Diana Dombrowski: Yeah, I'm definitely up for it. I'll be starting graduate school in California next month.

[00:41:26]

Kristie Abney: Congratulations. Where are you going to school?

[00:41:26]

Diana Dombrowski: Berkeley! I'm really excited, yeah.

[00:41:30]

Kristie Abney: Good for you.

[00:41:31]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Diana Dombrowski: Thank you. And so that's going to be a huge culture change, especially when it comes to wearing masks and to COVID altogether. My mom—

[00:41:40]

Kristie Abney: I think it's going to be a hugely positive thing for you, quite frankly. I'd like to live somewhere right now where people actually believe science, and I think Berkeley might be truly the epicenter of people who believe in science. [laughter]

[00:41:57]

Diana Dombrowski: That's true! And, you know, it's a decision that was really only possible—it felt possible—it really hinged on, for me, the national election and wondering whether or not—like, what would happen to universities and what would happen to science if we were going to go in this total other direction, what kind of jobs would be available. It really felt if the election had gone another way, but maybe [glitch in recording] dream or that plan that I had wouldn't [glitch in recording]. I'd really need to do some rethinking on it. So, I'm glad, even though it happened, you know, in this very small margin, that it did happen the way it did, and I can feel safe living here [laughs] and feel like I can plan a career, because it'll be environmental science that I'm focusing on.

[00:42:51]

Kristie Abney: Oh, good for you. What a fascinating topic and a fascinating time.

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

[00:42:54]

Diana Dombrowski: Thank you. Yeah, so it'd be wonderful to talk again. I would love that, to check in, yeah. Thank you.

[00:43:00]

Kristie Abney: Well, good for you and congratulations. That's huge. It's not easy to get into Berkeley.

[00:43:04]

Diana Dombrowski: No.

[00:43:05]

Kristie Abney: Good for you.

[00:43:05]

Diana Dombrowski: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

[00:43:08]

Kristie Abney: You're obviously just as smart as you come off on Zoom.

[00:43:11]

Diana Dombrowski: You're so kind. [laughter] I've been so impressed by how resilient and also very open you are.

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

[00:43:22]

Kristie Abney: Well, thank you.

[00:43:22]

Diana Dombrowski: [glitch in recording] imagine what it's been like to live in Georgia during this time and how angry, personally, I would feel and how difficult that would feel professionally, you know, to work in this environment and with these obstacles that are shifting so much. So I'm really—I'm very grateful for your openness and your willingness to share, because I think that the interviews we've done together will definitely provide a lot for people to learn from.

[00:43:54]

Kristie Abney: Well, thank you. Thank you for putting up with the fact that I can't figure out, clearly, how to put Chromecast on my computer. [laughter]

[00:44:05]

Diana Dombrowski: I'm sorry. I'm sorry it's so complicated, but, you know, together—

[00:44:09]

Kristie Abney: [glitch in recording]

[00:44:11]

Interview of: Kristie Abney
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Interview Date: July 30, 2021

Diana Dombrowski: Okay. Well, I'm grateful that you hung in there and we at least got Zoom up and running at the same time. Thanks for scheduling, because I'm glad that you're on vacation and doing something good for you and that you're safe and healthy and well. So [glitch in recording].

[00:44:28]

Kristie Abney: You, too, and congratulations on grad school. Good luck. And I'm available to talk again whenever you want.

[00:44:35]

Diana Dombrowski: Wonderful. Thanks so much. I'll be in touch. Bye-bye.

[End of interview]