

To Assist Community And Local Business Recovery & Resurgence

“The Oneida County A-to-Z Food Tour”

Nominee Organization: Oneida County Tourism

Summary:

The Oneida County A-to-Z Food Tour is an evergreen campaign that showcased more than 26 distinct local cuisines spanning over 30 local restaurants. The program allowed locals to vote for their favorite dish and let us know what restaurant it came from and what letter the dish started with. Then, we made a guide for each letter of the alphabet that lives on social media & our website, showing a wide variety of delicious dishes that both locals and visitors can use as a guide!

Description: Why does the program project person merit the New York State Tourism Industry Association Tourism Excellence Awards?

This project was truly a successful campaign and merits the NYSTIA Tourism Excellence Awards because it was a unique way to bring the community together while also driving business to local restaurants, especially less-known ethnic ones. Goals included helping restaurants, creating an evergreen food guide & ideally highlighting the diversity of Utica and the surrounding areas. We launched the campaign in winter because we knew restaurants couldn't cater to outdoor seating, something that was helpful during the warmer months. To kick off the campaign, we asked locals for their opinion. We felt that if we created the list ourselves, people may think we were biased or choosing favorites. Our region is VERY passionate about food so we felt this was a unique way to let locals have a voice and feel they helped create this guide. Additionally, whoever filled out the submission form on our website was automatically entered to win one of two \$50 gift cards to a local restaurant of their choosing. After tallying 200+ votes, we launched the campaign with one of our nominees, Symeon's Greek Restaurant. We sent out press releases and invited media to attend. We specifically worked with Spectrum News, who came to Symeon's for the launch. The restaurant did a behind-the-scenes segment and talked about the food industry and impact on tourism. We then promptly began to unveil each dish, letter by letter. The entire list was never fully revealed until the end which kept people interested throughout the duration of the campaign. It took almost six months to complete, partially because it was a tedious campaign and partially because we inserted these as an every-other post on our feed. After we created the master list, we had to sort and search through social media to see if we could find pictures of the chosen dish. For example, the letter 'X' was for Xanthi, a Greek gyro from Symeon's. If we did not have high-res photos of the dish, we had to work with the restaurant to set up a time for a photo/video shoot. One of my favorite aspects of the A-to-Z Food Tour was letting restaurants know that they had been chosen. It was a win-win because it gave them a huge sense of pride and acknowledged that they were producing high quality dishes because locals were specifically voting for them. A typical post had the letter of the alphabet, name and description of the dish, history of the restaurant, other popular dishes and their hours of operation. Our marketing firm, C&D Advertising, also

allocated some of our digital marketing budget to promote each dish for one week on Facebook and Instagram. This was such a fun campaign to work on but also definitely presented challenges. For some reason, we struggled with getting the media to cover it. We felt this was a feel-good campaign that highlighted places to eat and is a great resource for anyone visiting OR locals. It also was far more time consuming than I expected.

Other Key Partners:

C&D Advertising, Crowdriff, More than 25 local restaurants

For Program Projects ONLY:

This program meets the award category description and requirements because it had an array of positive impact on Oneida County. First, we were able to showcase more than 26 restaurants (some dishes used more than one restaurant). This drew attention to an important tourism-related industry within the county while encouraging people to explore new restaurants and try new dishes. Secondly, we came up with this idea after participating in Crowdriff's 2020 SEE Conference. In a full-circle moment, I was asked to be a speaker at the 2021 conference to tie in how we used Crowdriff and how the idea was sparked from another DMO in North Carolina. It was a great experience to see this campaign implemented elsewhere and then make it our own. Third, the campaign drove traffic to our social media and helped us gain more than 200 organic followers throughout the duration. Between digital marketing initiatives, friends and followers sharing our posts, and some local news coverage, more people learned about Oneida County Tourism and why we are a valuable community resource. As mentioned above, we worked with our advertising agency, C&D Advertising, to organize and promote the campaign. C&D ran the online submission pages for us and promoted each dish for a week on two forms of social media. From March-July, the posts had more than 60,000 engagements, reached 110,000 people & had almost 83,000 clicks.

For Individual Nominees:

I've attached graphs that show quantitative results demonstrating the positive impact the A-to-Z Food Tour had. As I briefly mention above, I think the best parts of this campaign were two-fold. First, almost every restaurant who was chosen was ecstatic when we told them they were selected. It gave them a sense of pride that people loved their food enough that they voted for their dishes. For example, Joey's 307 was selected for the letter 'L' (Lobster Everything). When I contacted the owner on Facebook, some of his responses were, "Wow, I'm honored to receive the votes. That's so awesome, you just made my day." On a different day, we visited Karam's Middle East Bakery for the letter 'C' (Chicken Friedman). The owners teared up when we told them why we were there, started calling their kids to post about it on social media, and asked for pictures with us. It was an emotional experience. On the other side, we taught locals and visitors how our area is so diverse in food, cultures, and people. Utica is one of the largest refugee communities in the United States and it's represented in our food. Pho Mekong House of Noodles was named 'D' for their Drunken Noodles. The post on Facebook had 24 comments and 25 shares. Comments ranged from people tagging their friends to shouting out how they love the

restaurant and owners. People even started tagging us on Facebook and Instagram when they visited a spot due to the campaign.

Documentation:

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/news/2021/03/04/oneida-county-tourism-promoting-local-restaurants>

<https://romesentinel.com/stories/iconic-boonville-creamery-on-a-z-food-tour,114238>

<https://www.symeons.com/author/symeon/>

<https://www.instagram.com/ocnewyork/guide/the-a-to-z-food-tour/18189937957103428/>
(Instagram Guide that lives forever and attaches to each letter's post)

<https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17843358767551423/> (Link to our Instagram highlights - each letter received a feature Instagram story)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMxLeZeHU22/> (example of Instagram post)

<https://www.facebook.com/page/188404528394/search/?q=pho%20mekong> (example of Facebook post)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/COBSE4fn24P/> (Instagram reel for one dish)