



How does your (beer) garden grow? Pretty amazingly, thank you

To help compensate for the loss of indoor dining during the pandemic, Dedham Country and Polo Club created a popular outdoor venue for pizza and beer.

By Kyle Jennings

The coronavirus pandemic has spurred the creative thinking of many club leaders, including Ryan M. Kenny, CCM, CCE. As general manager and COO of Dedham Country and Polo Club in Dedham, Mass., Kenny knew from the beginning that summer at DCPC was going to look different. Yet, he wanted to make sure the club remained a haven for its members.

With social distancing requirements in place, DCPC had to figure out where and how members could enjoy time at the club while remaining as safe as possible.

"DCPC is known for its outdoor spaces," Kenny said. "For years we have been trying to find a way to leverage our vistas and outdoor space. We started to brainstorm ideas for a safe outdoor dining venue, knowing full well that our indoor spaces would not be able to open."

Kenny said his board of governors was on board with the concept of outdoor dining, and within days picnic tables were purchased. Soon, the club ordered a pizza oven, and a few weeks later, a beer garden theme came to life.

"In between Zoom calls and speaker-series webinars, our food & beverage team themed the venue, and engineering started to build it," Kenny said.

"We have condensed our seven dining rooms to two large venues. The Porch features our regular menu of composed dishes and seats 60 people. And the Lawn, which is the beer garden, serves as our casual dining venue for the summer. That seats 100 people. We have been averaging 250 people each night in addition to our takeout dinners and meal kits."

To address the risks of COVID-19 and reduce member and staff exposure, DCPC implemented rules and guidelines within the beer garden. Tables are spaced 8 feet apart, staff must wear masks, paper menus are used instead of touch screens, and QR codes are available for members to access menus from their own devices.



Dedham Country and Polo Club in Dedham, Mass., takes advantage of its vistas and outdoor space during social distancing requirements.

"I have a nine-page document (of guidelines) I can share," Kenny said.

Surprisingly, he said, the learning curve for running an outdoor, socially distanced eatery has been smooth.

The biggest challenge has been dealing with the beer garden's popularity, "and having the best pizza in town," Kenny said. "Everyone wants to order pizza to go."

"The other challenge has been diners from our upstairs patio wanting to cancel their reservations to eat below."

Kenny said that in the past, many families were deterred from eating at the club multiple times a week because of the cost.

"Because we have this cheaper alternative, we're seeing more families visit additional nights every week," he said. "It's resulting in better than expected revenues."

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