

## CULINARY DISTANCING COS PROFILES

### Sarah Ryals, area freelance marketer and Culinary Distancing COS group member

“When I was in my 20s, putting myself through school, I worked as a waitress and bartender. I’ve been in those roles. There’s a natural connection for me and I’ve always had empathy for the service industry. Even in the best of times, waitstaff get treated badly by some people. But when they are making a fraction of their previous wages during the pandemic — to not treat them with courtesy and respect, it makes me crazy to think about. They aren’t first responders, but in a different way they’re also heroes, keeping businesses going until we get through. They don’t get the credit they deserve.”

“Being active in this group was a way to engage and stay in touch and find new options for dining. Craft breweries have popped up all over. I wanted to be informed about the local food and drink scene. Culinary Distancing COS did a great job of showcasing new and untried options for me. So much content was going in, and I discovered several new places. We’re regulars at some now, like the Wobbly Olive, which is way across town from where I live. And food trucks have been such a big thing. I didn’t even know we had so many. They’re great. My husband is a big fish and chips fan. On the Hook regularly goes to the Walgreens down the street from us. We go about 2 times a month; it’s fabulous. We’re grateful to have learned about it.”

“I created a safe dining guide that I posted on the group page in April 2020. It was a period of time where everyone was really frightened. There was a lot of fear. And that drove a couple types of customer behaviors. One side wanted to eat out, but was terrified of the risk. If they went out and saw someone not wearing a mask, they’d flare up. On the other side, people were feeling like the pandemic was a mass-hysteria situation. That, as a culture, we were overreacting- The wait staff, bartenders and owners were caught in the middle. They’re the public face of the business and anything going on with customer attitudes was impacting them. I figured someone should step in and at least try to articulate some common courtesy — guidelines for both sides. For the restaurants facing their business models blown up, scrambling to create new procedures to operate. And on the other side asking customers to be patient and show a little kindness and tolerance. I felt it was important to articulate and document it. Hopefully people looked at that and took away a new understanding of the situation we were all in together.”

“I don’t think people understood until the pandemic that so much of the national conversation takes place in bars and restaurants and event venues. When things are bad, people go out and want to socialize and be around each other to share and emote. And that was taken away by the pandemic. Events were gone. There was no outlet with venues closed. I don’t think we give ourselves enough credit for what we’ve been through and what it really meant. It will take years for us to move through and look back and understand how dire and extreme it was. And hopefully we’ll have a newfound appreciation for people in the hospitality industry. And an understanding of how important the industry is to our national culture.”



*Sarah Ryals, a freelance marketer, created a pandemic "safe dining guide" for restaurants and customers in early April 2020 based on Culinary Distancing COS group member feedback.*