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The new normal swings into summer - by Dennis Serpone

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Dennis Serpone

“Half a league, half a league, half a league onward, all in the valley of death rode the six hundred. Forward, the Light Brigade! Charge for the guns! he said: Into the valley of death rode the six hundred,” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

The restaurant industry has charged through the last couple of years, through the pandemic and through the problems relating to inflation and staffing. The most visible signs of distress have been the increases across the width and breath of menus and the reduction of operating days and hours. The national restaurant media indicates the sales have increased by 2-4% across the full service sector, stayed relatively constant for pubs in general, but increased closer to 5% for the fast food community due in part, as a result of increase delivery promotions.

The area of growth usually ignored due to their smaller number of units in New England are the casinos...Encore, Plainville, Bally's, Foxwoods, and Mohegan Sun.

They have been an adult playground for more of the locals, expensive if you lose, a bargain if you win. Overall casino visits are an expensive way to be entertained, however, with sports betting now fully intact in Massachusetts, the surge to the casino floor to watch and bet the college games is almost overwhelming. With their massive wall of wide-screen televisions, the cheering can be deafening. Sports betting has awakened the legislators who now see another stream of income that the population has been clamoring for. How long do you think before a progressive band of politicians decide that bringing back “happy hours” is long overdue.

Illinois joined Kansas as the second state to repeal a state ban on happy hour in the 21st century. Happy hours are still banned in Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Maine, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and right here in Massachusetts. Eleven out of fifty states...banned! However, there must be a redeeming quality of life in allowing marijuana to be sold in over 1,900 outlets in Massachusetts.

There's a major effort to infuse THC in food products and drinks that will blur the benefits and dangers.

With such a mild winter behind us, many snowbirds are asking themselves what did they escape to Florida from?

This year I am celebrating 43 years in the business of helping buyers and sellers move in or out of the food and beverage industry. In the span of 43 years, I've watched the ebb and flow of the growth or retraction of independent restaurants in New England. I'm happy to report that spring and summer restaurant and entertainment activity should exceed the two years before COVID-19 was an issue.

The former Red Parrot on Nantasket Beach, after a major renovation, now called The Parrot, should out perform any other beachside operation in the area. The popular water-view, second-floor

restaurant in Plymouth, Issac's, is undergoing a total renovation and should be the hottest restaurant in town next to the East Bay Grille. Over the bridge, the five primary areas of tourist attractions remain Falmouth, Hyannis, Yarmouth, Chatham, and Provincetown. Yarmouth and Hyannis, because of their easier access from Rte. 6 and proximity to Boston should set the stage for a huge summer. The motels, and individual home rentals are seeing earlier than usual inquiries for reservations...with prices exceeding those before the pandemic.

West Yarmouth has become a major tourist attraction with the ever-growing water park attracting over 5,000 young people per day. The parents, while their children are at play are either shopping across the street at the former Christmas Tree Plaza or catching a few cold beers and enjoying the entertainment at the Music Room. A local magazine named the Music Room the hottest nightclub on the Cape with national acts only seen in the larger big cities (MusicRoomCapeCod.com).

If on the other hand, you're not saddled with entertaining children and you're considered 'affluent', there is no better place on the Cape than Chatham.

Suffice to say that winter is over, spring holds high promises for people coming out of hibernation and focusing on socializing, and summer should be a non-brainer with new restaurants in the Seaport District and the diversity of food, beverage and retail in the ever-expanding Assembly Row. If you haven't been there yet, make a point of driving through. Almost anything you want can be had there...restaurants, pubs, movie theaters, super markets, boutique retail...with, what Boston lacks, easy access and plenty of parking. Those big erector cranes that you see from Rte. 93 are adding another 1.5 million s/f of office and retail space.

Our team of 20 restaurant specialists have their thumb on the pulse of everything happening there...and throughout the region.

Dennis Serpone is founder of the National Restaurant Exchange, Wakefield, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540