



Bridge Road Bistro has participated in all three Charleston Restaurant Weeks.

considering eating out, that would be good for restaurants,” says Dickinson Gould, president of Buzz.

It’s a model that had worked in many other cities. Gould had his first experience with a restaurant week in Washington, D.C., when he was fresh out of college and strapped for cash. “It just made an impression on me. It was a cool way to show people what you had to offer without the restriction of that really expensive meal,” he says.

The promotion

worked in Charleston, too. Diners came out in droves that first year, snatching up every available reservation at some restaurants. Since then, Buzz Food Service has organized two more Restaurant Weeks. The most recent, held in January 2016, featured 20 participating restaurants, which sold more than 10,000 meals and contributed an estimated \$500,000 to the city’s economy. “They get slammed, but it’s great. We’ve had clients tell us it’s the best week, financially, in their restaurant’s history,” Gould says.

Gould expects the event to keep growing. “I’ve read editorials where people feel like the model is played out. Not here. I meet people all the time who say ‘I just heard about Restaurant Week!’ As more and more people become aware of it, I know we can keep two dozen restaurants very busy for this otherwise cold week in January,” he says.

written by **ZACK HAROLD**



WHY IT WORKS

“A lot of people don’t stop to think, what is a chain restaurant and what is a local restaurant. There’s a lot of room for us to make an impression on the people of Charleston. The line of people that wait outside Olive Garden could probably support three more restaurants downtown. I feel like this promotion is a step toward that goal.”

“What we really want to do is introduce new customers to local restaurants. The hope is they try something they haven’t tried before, love it, appreciate the quality of the service, and come to the conclusion, ‘This is where I want to come for my birthday.’”

“I think part of the why Restaurant Week is a success is, eating in a crowded restaurant makes the food taste better. We’re so spoiled in Charleston—most Fridays you can get home from work and then decide, where do we want to go to dinner? You don’t have to worry about a reservation. To have a week where you have to plan ahead, it changes the experience.”

“We have a lot of people who contribute time and labor, as a labor of love. We’ve got a volunteer who designed a great website. We’d never met. He just said ‘I thought you could use a website—and sent me a link. Things like that make me love Charleston.’”



HOW WE DID IT

Generating Buzz

Restaurant Week takes off in Charleston.

JANUARY IS AN AWFUL TIME for the restaurant business. The weather is bad, everyone is still clinging to New Year’s resolutions, and no one wants to spend money after those Christmastime credit card statements arrive. Big restaurant chains can survive this slump without worry. But for locally owned restaurants, several weeks of slow business can be financially catastrophic.

That’s why the Charleston-based restaurant supplier Buzz Food Service decided to step in and help its local food scene. The company launched Charleston Restaurant Week in 2014 with eight restaurants offering special menus featuring three-course meals for \$30. “We thought anything that would get people