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SCRIPT BELOW:

After lockdowns in the spring pushed many independent restaurants to the brink, warmer weather and relaxed restrictions on capacity and alcohol sales allowed restaurants to find their footing and begin recouping their losses.

But with colder weather looming and the largest spikes in COVID-19 cases to date, restaurant owners face what could prove to be a difficult few months says **Lynn Minges**, president of the N.C. Restaurant and Lodging Association.

Minges sot - You know, going forward, the challenges we face are, are great. We know we're getting into the colder months. We're very fortunate here in North Carolina, that we typically have a milder or longer fall season and a milder winter. But ultimately, when that's not available, and they're forced to just go back to their indoor dining, they're going to be struggling at 50% capacity

The financial strain is evident in the applications by restaurant owners for government assistance.

On Nov. 10, Gov. **Roy Cooper** announced that a state Commerce Department program providing mortgage, rent and utility relief to certain businesses and nonprofits would extend its eligibility criteria to

include full-service restaurants. Owners could apply for up to \$20,000 per establishment with a cap of \$40,000 total per business.

Applications opened at 8 a.m. Nov. 12. By 5:30 p.m. that day, the department stopped accepting applications.

More than 1,300 restaurant applications were submitted that day, exceeding the allocated funding capacity

Restaurant owners across the state have found that no single innovation or response is a silver bullet. Instead, they are creating patchwork solutions based on their unique business models and the behaviors of their clients.

Under the current restrictions, **restaurants may operate at 50% of dine-in capacity** as long as they follow sanitation requirements. Because of social distancing requirements, restaurants may not be able to reach even 50% capacity, depending on their physical space.

For some restaurateurs, creating outdoor dining space has allowed for continued business.

Jason Smith, chef and owner of the 18 Restaurant Group, which includes three eateries in the Triangle, says Durham customers are much less willing to eat indoors while the indoor lunch crowd in Raleigh is surprisingly stable.

Smith - Durham is very cautious. there's not as many independent guys like me open the full service. numbers for national restaurants as well as independence aren't doing as good as they are and other other areas.

Chef **Keith Rhodes** and his co-owner and wife, **Angela**, operate their restaurant, **Catch**, in a Wilmington strip mall setting where outdoor dining is not an option. They closed during the initial lockdown and eventually shifted to takeout service.

Rhodes - Upon the onset of the pandemic, what we ended up really having to do was kind of reformulate our approach to food in delivery and pickup. Our food really didn't lend itself before to a delivery type of aspect. And I will say we had to quickly kind of pivot into a menu that would allow itself for delivering

Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurants Association executive director, says businesses in her city have benefited from quick action from the city.

Anderson - We probably have four restaurants that are open today because our city created spaces on street so that they could have outdoor dining, because they're rest. Independent restaurants tend to be in Asheville, in historical buildings, and they're not very big.

AIR partnered with nonprofits Mountain BizWorks and Co-operate WNC to purchase more than 200 high-quality outdoor heaters to be used in downtown Asheville this winter.

A nationwide shortage of outdoor heaters, likely caused by a combination of supply chain disruptions, coincided with a spike in demand from businesses and individuals hoping to keep warm outside.

As colder weather threatens the relative stability that some restaurants have managed to achieve with outdoor seating, business owners are turning to new avenues to help them limp through the winter - including take out and holiday meals.

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