

# Virus leads two prime Atlantic City restaurants to close

WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY — Two popular and highly regarded restaurants in Atlantic City will remain closed permanently, victims of the coronavirus and the restrictions that came with it.

Philadelphia restaurateur Stephen Starr told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Buddakan and The Continental, which have been closed since mid-March, will not reopen.

Both were located inside the former Playground Pier, which Caesars Entertainment recently repurchased from developer Bart Blatstein. The pier has had extremely low levels of foot traffic, and a majority of its stores have been empty for more than a year.

The two eateries combined employed more than 100 people. Employees were notified late Monday that the businesses would not reopen.

“It was a nice run, but we had to say goodbye,” said Starr, who operates high-profile restaurants in Philadelphia, New York, Washington and Paris that remain in business.

“We couldn’t continue in this environment with the coronavirus and the current state of the pier,” he said. “There was barely anyone left there except us.”

Regardless of who owned it, the pier has struggled for years, due in part to its location jutting out over the ocean across the Boardwalk from Caesars casino. Guests either had to find a parking space in a parking garage the casino also shares with a hospital, or find a space in a lot blocks away and walk to the pier.

Nonetheless, Starr’s two restaurants there consistently won rave reviews from customers and were regarded as among Atlantic City’s top eateries. Diners went online Tuesday afternoon to lament the absence of The Continental’s Brussels sprouts and wasabi mashed potatoes, and the oversized martinis that often accompanied them.

Kris Neff, executive chef at The Continental, said the monthslong closure because of the virus and the lack of foot traffic made it difficult to survive.

“The occupancy in Atlantic City, for sure, would not have been there, not being able to host the large conferences and concerts that enable us to be profitable,” he said. “As far as destination restaurants in Atlantic City go, this is definitely a big loss.”

He plans to launch a private chef business shortly.

Starr said he opted not to reopen a month ago when New Jersey allowed indoor dining to resume, but only at 25% of capacity.

“We would have lost tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars,” he said.

He made the decision to close a Continental restaurant in Philadelphia a week ago but said it will eventually reopen with a new concept.

“We are still very open as a company,” he said. “We are surviving in many other places. But to open just before winter, during the virus on an empty pier in Atlantic City would have been a disaster.”