



Capo Italian Deli's popular to-go cocktail is called the Fauci Pouchy.



PHOTO: REY LOPEZ

Andra "AJ" Johnson is partner and Beverage Director at Serenata.

# Hope for the Future

THE WASHINGTON, D.C., HOSPITALITY COMMUNITY RESPONDS IN CREATIVE WAYS TO THE CRISES OF OUR TIME by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

On May 29, the Washington, D.C., area entered Phase One of the reopening process, allowing restaurateurs and bar owners to once again welcome patrons for outdoor service; beyond rooftops and patios, those with permits could even set up tables in parking lots and alleys. That same weekend, proprietors' responses to the protests sparked by the senseless death of George Floyd varied. One owner was called out on social media for a tone-deaf apology for customer disruption; markedly different was a tweet from Michelle Brown, whose Asian tea house Teatism, located near the White House, sustained damage: "Before anyone puts a single word in our mouths. Black lives matter."

In short, a much-needed dialogue about racial inequality has begun. Union Market's Afro-Caribbean-owned, Latin American-inspired Serenata hosted a series of pop-ups to benefit organizations that fight racism in the U.S. For one of them, Back to Black, partner and Beverage Director Andra "AJ" Johnson mobilized Black beverage pros, including Roy Boys' Frank Mills and Kapri Robinson of Chocolate City's Best, to create signature cocktails

symbolizing their personal journeys; proceeds went directly to each bartender's charity of choice. Johnson told me she wanted to "create space for bartenders and chefs to express their frustrations, unpack their burdens, and tap into their creativity without the constant constraints of their daily routines and obligations."

Meanwhile, the region's hospitality industry continues to respond to the impact of the coronavirus by regrouping and retooling in never-before-imagined ways. For one example, Chris Morgan, chef and co-owner at the upcoming Bammy's at the Navy Yard, spearheaded the launch of Save DC Eats, a program for which chefs and restaurateurs offered unique experiences to buy now and redeem later. These included a Laotian cooking class for ten at Thip Khao and an in-home dinner prepared by Tim Ma of American Son, with 100% of all proceeds going to industry professionals affected by the pandemic. Another notable example is Mintwood Place in Adams Morgan, which in the past few months has hired a new chef, redesigned its menu, started lunch service with weekly themed pop-ups, and launched an in-house delivery

service. "Day to day, we're energized by the larger challenge of how to keep the spirit of hospitality and human connection alive through [our] work," said sommelier and General Manager Gene Alexeyev. "Despite the times . . . we are excited to figure out the many new pieces of our sometimes scary, often confusing world."

Local bartenders have also been having fun with takeout. While Service Bar was batching large-format drinks with names like "Drinking to Forget" and "I Got a Zoom Party Tonight," social distance-promoting sports bar Dirty Water lowered buckets of vodka cocktails from its third-story building in the Atlas District to customers below. But it was Shaw's Capo Italian Deli that took the cake with its Fauci Pouchy, an adult version of Capri Sun that quelled our anxiety as much as the briefings from the affable infectious-diseases doctor it was named for. We will get through this. ■■

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