

Upper Valley Eateries and Retail cooperative to offer local delivery service

by [Eliza Durbin](#) | 2/5/21 2:15am [f](#) [t](#)



by [Anthony Robles](#) / The Dartmouth Senior Staff

Hungry Hanover residents will soon have a new means of supporting their favorite local restaurants. To help brave the colder months, local businesses Boloco, Lou's and Murphy's on the Green have banded together to form the Upper Valley Eateries and Retail cooperative, which will offer delivery services through a mobile "UVER" app.

In the 11 months since the pandemic began, local restaurants have faced a slew of hurdles. Many initially [struggled](#) to retain customers in the absence of dine-in options, and [some Hanover institutions closed permanently](#). Winter has posed new obstacles as [outdoor dining options have dwindled](#). With UVER, Lou's owner and CEO Jarett Berke Tu'17 said he hopes to offer new opportunities for business struggling this season.

The UVER app is expected to be available to customers by the end of February, according to Berke, who has so far spearheaded the development of the cooperative. The app will begin with a pilot group of Boloco, Lou's and Murphy's, but Berke said that he hopes to have upwards of 50 businesses, including retail stores, farms and convenience stores, in the cooperative as soon as possible.

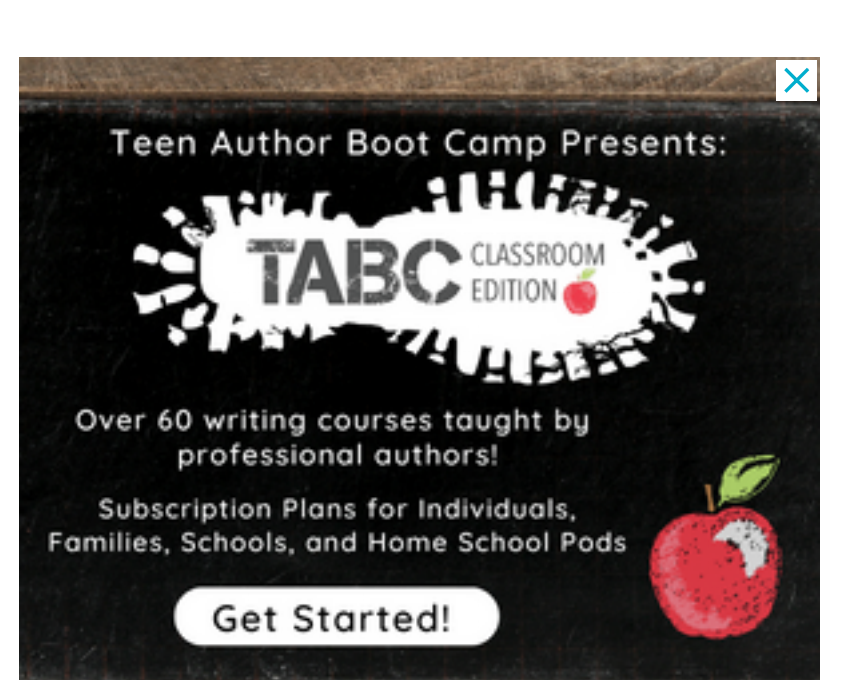


"I think there's more support if we do something and people know it's local," Murphy's owner Nigel Leeming said. "... I think people are more apt to use it because they trust it better and they know that it's staying in-house."

Berke said that the businesses hope the cooperative will increase both efficiency and revenue. A key component of the app will be the opportunity for businesses to share delivery cars and drivers, especially during peak hours.

"At lunch time, we'll have five deliveries that come in within 30 minutes of each other — one of them is to the College, one of them is to the hospital, another one is out in White River Junction — and so we have a driver that's kind of driving all over the place," Berke said. "Every other restaurant is experiencing the same thing."

Berke said that UVER drivers will use their own cars and will be able to pick up orders from different restaurants that are going to similar destinations in order to streamline the delivery process. This will also keep all earnings in Hanover rather than fund national delivery services such as Grubhub and DoorDash, which take as much as 30% of revenue from transactions, Berke said.



"We are keeping the money local, keeping it in the hands of the people doing the work, helping us raise wages in our restaurants as opposed to paying it out to people in corporate in San Francisco," Boloco owner John Pepper '91 Tu'97 said.

Although business owners believe they can count on many in the community to use the UVER app rather than other national delivery services, Pepper said that he worries about the popularity of the app among students.

"People come in from their hometowns where they use these [national] apps, and if that app is on their phone it's going to take a lot to have them not use Grubhub here," Pepper said.

Though the delivery cooperative may offer hope for some local restaurants, many reported that they were still struggling to get through the pandemic, especially during the colder months. Pepper said that Boloco, for example, is still experiencing decreased patronage, with revenues "probably down 50% from last year" due to COVID-19 and a decreased on-campus student population.

Pepper said that he has relied on the federal Paycheck Protection Program, from which Boloco just received its second round of funding.



"I hope it covers us through the rest of the pandemic, even if things continue the way they are, which is very slow," Pepper said.

Lou's has stayed open, with its main business from deliveries and takeout, Berke said. The restaurant is currently operating at just above 30% of indoor seating capacity in accordance with New Hampshire regulations and is also doing between 20 and 35 deliveries a day, he said.

Hanover town manager Julia Griffin described the fine line that restaurants like Lou's and Boloco have had to walk in order to balance COVID-19 concerns with a need for revenue.

"We want our downtown to thrive, and we want our businesses to succeed — and yet we want to manage the potential for COVID spreading," Griffin said.

In the months since the outdoor dining shutdown, Griffin noted that some restaurants have struggled more than others. The decreased demand for dining after students left in the fall coupled with the lack of outdoor seating prompted Dirt Cowboy Cafe, Murphy's and Candela Tapas Lounge to temporarily close, according to Griffin. While Murphy's and Candela have reopened, Dirt Cowboy is undergoing renovations and remains closed.



Looking forward, however, Griffin said there is reason to be optimistic. Once the weather allows, outdoor dining will resume, and the town of Hanover is even looking into making it a more permanent fixture.

"We'll take this one month at a time in terms of working with the restaurants and getting them outdoors," Griffin said. She added that she and other town officials are considering various options for permanent outdoor dining structures that could be used year-round, which would likely be built during the summer of 2022.

"We plan to replace our sidewalks on South Main Street, on Lebanon Street and on Allen Street, and potentially on South Street," Griffin said. "[There is] lots of creative thinking on how to pull diners outdoors more permanently."

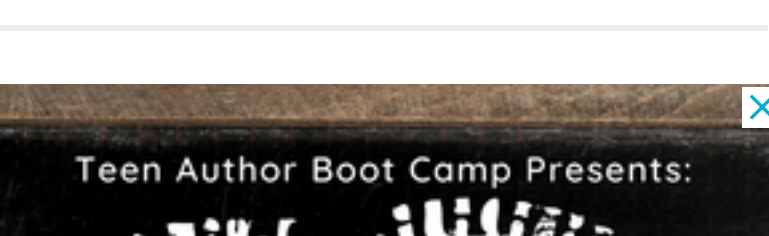
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