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Take a look at the sleek new food court at Midway Airport

The airport is unveiling a sleek new food court with Carrara marble, light wood accents, midcentury seating and new restaurants.

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After 14 months of temporary food options, the first round of new, permanent restaurants are opening as the airport unveils a food court in previously unused space in Concourse A.



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Sushi from Arami

It's finally here. Well, make that partially finally here.

After 14 months of lackluster temporary food options at Midway Airport, the first round of new, permanent restaurants will be open for business July 30 as the airport unveils a sleek new food court in previously unused space in Concourse A.

The 6,300-square-foot area, which offers plenty of light and broad views of the runways courtesy of floor-to-ceiling windows, resembles a modern kitchen remodel: Carrara marble counters, light wood accents and trendy white midcentury seating. More important for travelers who have bemoaned the loss of Harry Caray's, Potbelly and McDonald's, the food court also hosts three new restaurants: Arami, a spinoff of the West Town sushi restaurant created by **Michelin-starred chef Ty Fujimura**; Woodgrain Neapolitan Pizzeria, a wood-fired pizza chain with three west suburban locations; and Billy Goat Tavern, the Chicago institution made famous by a "Saturday Night Live" skit. The enclave will also include a new, sit-down location for Reilly's Daughter, the longtime Oak Lawn Irish pub that's operated an airport outpost for more than 15 years, plus a fresh home for Nuts on Clark.

"We know that some people have expressed concern over the loss of old favorites, but we think this new round shines a light on some of Chicago's great food options," says Erin O'Donnell, Midway's managing commissioner.



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Floor-to-ceiling windows allow plenty of light and views of airport activity.

"We now have something to point to, even though we've been making lots of behind-the-scenes tweaks," says Sammy Patel, CEO of Midway Partnership, a team consisting of major airport concession company SSP America; Hudson Group, which runs the ubiquitous Hudson News airport convenience stores and stands; and Vantage Airport Group, an airport manager and developer. The group won the Midway bid in February 2017 and took over last summer. "We know we upset customers' routines, and we absolutely heard their feedback loud and clear."

The new Concourse A spots join two local places that opened in Concourse B in late May: Porkchop, a six-location barbecue restaurant that began in the West Loop, and Big & Little's, a three-outlet chain known for its fish tacos.

Come August, early-morning business travelers will also be able to buy breakfast sandwiches at the Dunkin' Donuts in the older, central food hall. It currently serves only coffee and doughnuts. (The departed McDonald's and Potbelly, however, are not coming back. O'Donnell acknowledges neither vendor is part of the current renovation plan.)

MORE CHANGES TO COME

Midway travelers pining for the temporarily removed Harry Caray's will have to wait, but they can do so with better caffeine. Big Shoulders Coffee, currently served by some of the airport's temporary food vendors, will get its own location at the end of Concourse A by year-end. An Einstein Bros. Bagels will debut then as well. (In the meantime, all the new permanent restaurants serve Big Shoulders or Intelligentsia coffee, plus hot and/or grab-and-go breakfast options.) Big Shoulders and Einstein will be joined by Harry Caray's in 2019. Construction will also start this winter on a new Hubbard Inn, a River North bar and restaurant, in Concourse B.



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The food court occupies previously unused space.

More changes and additions to the main food hall, positioned past the current security checkpoint, won't happen until the end of next year. The incremental changes, temporary options and overall wait are due to construction of the airport's new, 80,000-square-foot security pavilion, which broke ground in late 2017 and is scheduled for completion in early 2020. O'Donnell and Patel say they have had to juggle section-by-section renovations without

totally interrupting service to passengers. "It's a synchronized military operation," O'Donnell says.

The security checkpoint, which will represent a sixfold increase in size, will be built by expanding the pedestrian bridge over Cicero Avenue as part of the city's \$323 million Midway Modernization Project.

Once the security area exists, the current checkpoint and central food court will be redone to include modern decor, seating with power outlets, and more restaurants and retail. Most of the current food vendors will exit, replaced by another round of newcomers including Gene's Bistro by Gene & Georgetti, Goddess & the Grocer, Freshii, R.J. Grunt's and Epic Burger. Some \$75 million of the modernization project will go to concession improvements, increasing square footage to 70,000 from about 40,000.

Retailers will include Coach, Tumi, Kiehl's, upscale candy store Lolli & Pops, and FAO Schwarz, the once-iconic toy retailer that has shuttered most of its stores in recent years amid multiple ownership changes. The central food and retail area will also welcome a business lounge in 2020 that will be open to anyone for a fee, rather than to passengers of a specific airline.

"A better TSA area will reduce passengers' wait time, which will lead to more time to shop and browse," O'Donnell says.

Adds Patel, "If they're happier, they shop more, and we make more money."

That's already happening. Food and beverage sales at Midway last year totaled \$81.5 million, almost a 6 percent increase from \$77 million in 2016. Since Midway Partnership came on board in June 2017, the airport's food revenue has increased 11 percent, to \$85 million, for the year ended May 31.

Inline Play

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