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## Maribel Gonzalez Interview Part 2

Mark Naison

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Bethany Fernandez

Okay, so today is Wednesday, November 11th. The time now is 2:02, and I'm here with Maribel Gonzalez...

Maribel Gonzalez

Hello!

Bethany Fernandez

...owner and manager of The South of France. And so, good afternoon! It's a pleasure to be here talking with you again.

Maribel Gonzalez

Thank you. Hi, how are you? It's my pleasure. Thank you for the invitation.

Bethany Fernandez

I'm doing well. You--so before we start, I'd just like to ask you to state and spell your name—so that we have that for the record.

Maribel Gonzalez

Of course. Maribel Gonzalez; M-A-R-I-B-E-L G-O-N-Z-A-L-E-Z.

Bethany Fernandez

Perfect. And so, I guess the best way to start is: how are you doing? Considering the last time that we talked, you know, so much has happened. So many months have passed. So how are you doing? What new has happened, for you?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, you know, thank you so much for this opportunity. It's a little bit more of the same, unfortunately. We're still hanging in there, you know; however, still grateful that some months have passed and we're still here—you know, though, very trepidatiously because we're still, you know, not knowing if we're going to be here from one month to the next. Because the situation is still very precarious. Very delicate. Very doubtful, you know. And we're still fighting. We're doing the best to stay open, to keep staff employed, and it's definitely a struggle. The biggest problem is the whole, you know, "up and down, up and down" as to, you know--some days are good, some days are bad, and without a steady flow, you can't survive that way.

Bethany Fernandez

And so you mentioned that there's hasn't been a steady flow. Could you just, like, talk a little bit more about that? Especially considering that there has been so many new additions to, like--like, the rules for COVID has sort of led up a little bit. So how has that been?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, they've let up and not let up. You know, maybe for the public, they've let up, but for businesses it continues to be rather stringent. You know, you have to be very aware. With the

fact that now they've added the twenty-five percent indoor seating, it has helped a little bit, but you still have to be extremely vigilant in, you know, taking temperature, having everyone stand in the front, not enter the premises until their temperature has been taken, the documents have been filled as--like their name, their email, contact information, phone number, etcetera. And then, you know, spacing, the six feet between tables, and everything. So the up and down, meaning that, you know, the weather has changed, the twenty-five percent has been now included, but it's not a steady stream of income to be able to go back to all the activities that we used to do. So the the income is still very, you know, doubtful. You don't know how you're going to do from one day to the next, and you can't move forward to continue to plan and have your normal activities like you used to.

Bethany Fernandez

And could you just talk a little bit about those activities that you used to do? I know that The South of France is, like, really known for building community through their, like, programming? And--like, have you been able to find a new way to implement programming considering that you have, you know, all of these restrictions?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, we've only been able to reinstate our karaoke—and even that, partially. We resumed our Karaoke Wednesdays and Saturdays from 7:00 to 11:00 pm. Those are new hours for us. We used to do it from 9:00 to 1:30 and 10:00 to 2:00 am, but, you know, with the restrictions of having to close the business by 12:00 midnight or 12:30 if you still have a dining patron. But, however, we've had to change the hours, and we've reinstated that but not to full capacity—again, because you can only do twenty-five percent, you know. And that's only limiting to, you know, five, six tables at a time. And we haven't been able to resume our other activities, such as our open mic spoken word. We haven't been able to resume comedy. We haven't been able to open our doors for all the community events to hold their meetings and their monthly events at our place. We've lost all our catering jobs, and this year, I've lost about an average of ten catering jobs, which was, you know, equivalent to over forty thousand dollars in lost revenue. And, you know, those things are very impactful when you still have all the ongoing expenses. You know, you still have all these operating costs, and even now, they've increased. Because of the outdoor dining, many business insurances have now added a premium, because--you know, in order to cover outdoor dining. So I know my insurance has gone up almost three thousand dollars a year because of the outdoor dining. So these are the inconveniences, if you will, in trying to run the business that is still not able to come back to.

Bethany Fernandez

And I have to thank you for, like, putting numbers to, like, a lot of the stuff that's going on because when, you know--if you're a customer, you kind of just walk into the restaurant and have--you just order your meal and then you go, but you don't really know much about the logistics and the things that are going on behind the scenes. To the catering part, have you even had, like, sort of, like, maybe bigger orders where you might need to make, like, maybe ten or so meals? And how has it been working with, like, the whole, like, individual packaging and things like that?

Maribel Gonzalez

Extremely stressful, because it has added on more expenses. You have to buy more more packaging items. They also have to be, you know, held accountable to new guidelines. You know, you have to purchase more, because--more frequently, rather, in lessened numbers, because you don't know how much business you're going to have. So, you know, you don't want to buy in large numbers to fulfill the capacity that you did before because you don't know if you're going to have business and then you're going to be left with inventory that you spent money on, that you can afford, that you're not going to be using. So, you know, these are all the things that one has to constantly be thinking about, in this whole reinventing of how you operate...

Bethany Fernandez

Right.

Maribel Gonzalez

...under this pandemic.

Bethany Fernandez

And so when we think about, like, buying groceries and buying things for inventory, generally for restaurants, it's like, if you buy more, you get more of a discount, right?

Maribel Gonzalez

Right.

Bethany Fernandez

So you're kind of getting, like, a little bit more bang for your buck. So, like, I'm assuming that, with the change of, like, how you're ordering things, like, that's definitely taking a hit with, like, the money that you could be saving.

Maribel Gonzalez

Taking a hit, because you have to make more trips, you're spending more on gas, you have to buy less because you have to want to keep everything fresh and so you can't buy in the same volume. So--and actually, in actuality, is costing more money, because, like you mentioned, when you buy in bulk, you know, you're able to save, but when you have to buy in smaller amounts, in order to keep everything current and fresh, then it's more costly and it's more cumbersome and having to, you know, take more time to make more trips, and etcetera. So I used to buy once or twice a week, and now I know I have to do like three or four times a week in lesser amounts but more spending more money in order to keep everything--you know, if I have business that I know I'm going to have, you know, thirty customers that day, as opposed to a hundred that I may normally have, then I can't buy for a hundred because I'll have wastage.

Bethany Fernandez

Right. And has any of, like, the companies that have been, like, selling groceries and stuff have tried to, like, you know, meet you halfway, give you some sort of, like, deal? How have they been trying to work with you on these type of things?

Uh, no. [laugh]

[laugh]

Maribel Gonzalez

In plain language, no. I mean, you know, these big stockpile operations, they, you know, have their own considerations and quotas to meet and--you know, they will put things on special, but that's just like they used to, but there is no, you know, COVID deduction or discount or anything like that. So that hasn't happened yet that I've seen actually.

Bethany Fernandez

And I remember when we were talking about preparing things for inventory before, you said that you had to go to a whole bunch of different places. You had to, like, get up early, do all these things just to get, like, the things that you needed for like a day. Has it become easier? Like, have you been able to have access to, like, more sellers now that stuff is sort of...

Maribel Gonzalez

No, actually; on the contrary, it's become much harder. Because things like, you know, even bags and plastic gloves and masks—which, you know, you should be able to provide to your customers if you want them to be a patron--sometimes they leave it in their car or they've lost it or whatever it is, so--aside from hand sanitizer, and masks, you have to provide that--so--they often run out. And so, you know, because everyone is clamoring for the same thing, you have to go to several different locations or find sources or spend even more money to order it online and wait longer for its arrival. So it's actually become more difficult.

Bethany Fernandez

And also, what I wanted to know was, you know, in New York, we have the plastic bag ban and now everything has to be reusable paper. Has that also taken a hit on you? I know that they had a grace period before and I know that some places had the plastic bags, but now it's very much, like, no plastic bags.

Maribel Gonzalez

Right. That's also been an issue because you have to buy more brown paper bag paper products, and so, you know, they've come up in price. They're also not always available. You have to buy--what you could put, you know, in one plastic bag, now you have to buy several different size bags to accommodate all the different items so that, again, there's no, you know, wastage. So all these things have changed. And surely, it's the best thing to keep everyone safe, but it's become more cumbersome on the business because of, you know, the travel, the

availability, the increase in costs, the changes. It's part of the constant reinventing of oneself in this industry nowadays.

Bethany Fernandez

Right. And also, with all of--and you are very much like a small business, you know, very community focused and--so, when it comes to this type of increase in costs, like, how does that--we're talking about all the different ways that it takes a toll and, like, its specifics, but overall, how would you, like, describe, you know, all of these restrictions and all of these costs and, you know, a whole new list of things to do for you as a small business owner and, like, for your team?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, if I had to say one word, it's very uncertain. It's very uncertain. You know, you have to do with what you can. You're constantly worried if not only are you going to be able to stay open, but are you going to be able to continue to employ your people. You know, what has happened now different than from the last time that we spoke is just--I think we spoke sometime in the beginning of summer and so on--is that now the weather is changing. So, you know, we don't have the flexibility with the outdoor seating that we did, because we have, again, additional expenses with regards to having to provide outdoor heating and so on. So even though we may have already used our tents that we did, and umbrellas and so on, you know, now you have to have it as enclosed as possible, you have to provide heating, and there's no allowances from the city for another go-around, if you will, for a stimulus or anything for small businesses to make us compensate for the lack of increased seating indoors. So, you know, it's a lot of uncertainty with "Are you going to still be able to keep employees that were furloughed that you bought back because business increased in the summer because you had more seating available outdoors?" And now you find yourself with the weather changing, not the availability of heaters because now they're also very scarce and for propane heating, which is only allowed on the sidewalks—you also have time an inspection from the fire department and a permit. And--you know, and then are you able to still continue to have these employees working for you? So--

Bethany Fernandez

And just to clarify: to get a permit to have the propane heating, would that cost money as well?

Maribel Gonzalez

No, you have to contact them and wait for an appointment. But, you know, these heroes are not inexpensive. And unfortunately, just like anything else, there's a lot of price gouging going on. So, you know, something that costs maybe a hundred and fifty dollars is now three hundred dollars, not to mention that it's not available, you know. Everyone is going on Amazon and so on--and the Home Depot's of the world and the Lowe's, etcetera—and they're usually out of stock. And if you didn't, you know, preplan for it—and even if you tried to plan for it, if you don't have the means with the budget—then you know, you're at a loss now trying to operate at only depending the under twenty-five percent indoors.

Bethany Fernandez

So I want to go back to sort of, like, you know, kind of where we left off with June, and that was the beginning of like, phase two, you know—it was starting to open up, you could do takeaway. But I want to think more about what--like, sort of that transition into, like, outdoor dining. How was the process with that? You know, I--there's a restaurant, like, down the road, and I saw them literally have a make--they literally makeshift an outdoor seating area.

Maribel Gonzalez  
[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez  
So I just want to know, like, what, what was that process like for you to prepare it?

Maribel Gonzalez  
Well, aside from it being extremely expensive—because for my cause, it literally added an approximate fifteen-thousand-dollar cost that I didn't expect that I had to all of a sudden find within weeks to be able to provide outdoor seating. And, you know, you're clamoring to get tents, to get tables, to get chairs, to get umbrellas. And, you know, that was an enormous task undertaken to be able to do that. I went to literally about five or six places, just looking to color coordinate umbrellas, to make them, you know--I bought three here, two there, one in Queens--I mean, you know, all over the place. And that did help temporarily. Business did go work for the months of July and August. And then, you know, with the homeschool, and all the uncertainty, and the news media talking about the resurgence and everything. So now you have this this last quarter of the year and the upcoming holidays where, again, it's gone back to a lot of uncertainty, you know—not to mention that still to this day, whatever I take out has to be, you know, that--you were saying, that place, makeshifted a whole outdoor seating, but I have to take it out—takes about an hour and a half to set everything up—and then you have to bring everything back in towards the end of the night. So it adds about three hours of work to your daily schedule.

Bethany Fernandez  
And time is money. And I would imagine that it's super hard to find, like, quality seating, because I've seen restaurants that have outdoor seating, and it looks like they went got, like, the same chairs like they would for school. [laugh]

Maribel Gonzalez  
[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez  
Like a school. So I would imagine finding something that's, like, you know, up to your standard of making sure that people are comfortable and able to have a good dining experience must have been extremely tough.

Maribel Gonzalez

It was extremely tough. And, you know, some people—some restaurant tourism—you know, just taking their indoor furniture and brought it out. But, you know, that will—I knew that that would eventually present a problem and they would reinstate the indoor dining. So I said if I use that furniture, then I'm not going to have anybody to sit, you know, to [laugh] any seating for indoors, because the weather could still be nice, you know—September October. So I was forced to buy, you know, like forty tables, and eighty chairs. And, you know, that was an unexpected cost of, you know, nearly four thousand dollars. And you want to make it as presentable and as appealing as possible so that people can say, you know, "This is a nice entity that I want to go to, that I want to support," that they can feel comfortable and safe. A problem that I ran into were, you know, the city guidelines. And at the beginning they said yes, you can have outdoor seating, and you could have roadway seating, what they call, which is on the street that you can block off a certain area in front of your location. And so I went out and I bought what I thought were acceptable barricades, and, you know, put signage on them. That was well over two thousand dollars and within two days, an inspector came and said, "Well, now there are new rules, new guidelines and specifications to follow. And these are not acceptable. And so, you know, this is the height, width, length, etcetera, of what you need to do for the outside roadway seating." And so to fulfill that, to be able to compete, and to have outdoor seating, that cost an additional unexpected forty eight hundred dollars just to get 12 of those barricades.

Bethany Fernandez

Right. And what I'm hearing from all of this is that there wasn't much communication between, you know, the city who's creating all of these guidelines and rules and, you know, requirements that you have to follow—like, there's no way around it...

Maribel Gonzalez

Right.

Bethany Fernandez

...and within the business, who needs to, you know--they need to be up-to-date--

Maribel Gonzalez

Yeah.

Bethany Fernandez

--with the requirements, because that's how you can sell things.

Maribel Gonzalez

Right.

Bethany Fernandez

So would you sa, that it's definitely, like, the case where it's, like...

Maribel Gonzalez

Yeah.

Bethany Fernandez

...just lack of communication...

Maribel Gonzalez

Right.

Bethany Fernandez

...very much like you don't know when a new guideline is going to come a new requirement?

Maribel Gonzalez

That's a big problem, right. And, you know, I understand having empathy with the city that, you know, this is all our first go-around, if you will, on this, and they're doing the best that they can to help us stay in business, and, you know, they're flying by the seat of their pants, if you will, as well, you know. However, for a small business, you know, when you're told one thing and then a couple of days or a week later, that changes, and so now that's another investment, that's a big problem for us. So that whole guidelines and late notifications, and so on was a big problem. You know, because we need clear direction, we need to know where we can find that. Many times, I'm calling 311, I'm calling the mayor's office, the governor's office, I'm calling Small Business Affairs, I'm calling Consumer Affairs. So I'm all over the place, trying to conform, trying to find out the latest guidelines. And even--you know, they set up this New York restart hotline for small businesses. And often, you know, they didn't even know themselves because they said, "I'm sorry, we don't have the latest update information to give you on that yet." I often asked questions that they could not answer, you know. And so that was extremely, extremely frustrating. So, you know, moving forward, there has to be a more concise plan, with specific non-changing guidelines that we can all get in a timely basis, and depend on and have assurance that we're not going to have an additional cost, you know, after that, because there's going to be yet another change.

Bethany Fernandez

And I know that all these--you've definitely invested so much money into these things, right? Do you think that you could even possibly use some of the stuff that you've bought in the future? Like, a lot of the stuff seems very situational to COVID, so I'd like to know. Do you think you could, like, make this investment worthwhile? [laugh]

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, we're hoping that we can. Luckily—and we're very grateful—the city did extend the outdoor seating on a permanent basis. Yes, year around. And, you know, you can—if you can afford it—set it up permanently. So, you know, particularly in our case for the summertime, all the furniture that we that we bought that was more summer-conducive, if you will, outdoor seating, then, you know, we'll be able to use that again starting next spring and summer.

Bethany Fernandez

That's great to hear. And then also, it seems like this--not only is the cost financial—like you're spending dollars—but you're spending a lot more time doing things like making phone calls and buying things and searching for them because you can't find them. So how has that increase in time, like, invested in the whole business sort of been taking a toll on you? You mentioned that you have to do three hours of additional setup, you'd have to probably spend a day going around the town trying to get furniture and things like that. So I just want to hear a little bit more about your experience with all this added time that has been put onto your job.

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, it's basically added frustration and added stress, you know. All this has not only been a financial concern, but it's an emotional, it's a mental, it's a physical burden, you know, with not only the concerns of operating and maintaining everything up-to-date and, you know, staying within the guidelines, keeping people employed, or marketing to try to maintain or get new people, new faces, but it's very cumbersome in that, you know, you're operating on exhaustion because, like I say, you just added three hours to your work. You know, you have to be able to set up before. So if I normally open at 12:00 noon, now I have to be there at 10:00 am so that I can set up and be ready to open my doors at 12:00 noon. And, you know, that includes not only the setup outside, but inside. You have to sanitize. You have to make all these products available so that your customers can see that you're complying and they can feel safe and all that--you know, they can count on your place to follow the rules, if you will. And it's extremely tiresome. And--but, you know, you believe in the industry. You have hope that people will, will come support. And I have my faith, as I said, so we're working on always staying with the glass half full.

Bethany Fernandez

And that is definitely a powerful message there, you know, just being able to hold on to hope even when, you know, everything is uncertain. One other thing that I wanted to ask about, like, being in the restaurant was, like, wearing the mask and, like, social distancing guidelines. Like, have you had any issues with, like, customers not adhering?

Maribel Gonzalez

[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

You know, walking in with a mask wanting to eat or, like, they don't want to stay six feet away from people? Like...

Maribel Gonzalez

Yes.

Bethany Fernandez

Have you had any of those issues?

Maribel Gonzalez

Yes. Aside from, you know, all the stresses of managing the operation on a daily basis with, you know, making sure that food is coming out on a timely basis and things like that, you also now have to have on the additional hat of being the vigilant police, if you will, you know. You're constantly telling people, "I'm so sorry. If you stand up, you have to wear your mask. If you come inside, if you're sitting outside, you're welcome to use the restroom, but you have to put on the mask. You cannot hang out outside and stand holding a beer or an alcoholic beverage in your hand on the sidewalk and talking and saying 'hi' to a friend. You can only consume when you're sitting down at the table. You know, you have to constantly wear the mask even if you're going to go into the restroom." So you're always, you know, being as polite as possible. But there's so many rules to follow, you know, with the stay within six feet. You can't have more than ten people at a service at the same time. You can't book a party for more than, you know, twenty-five, max of fifty people. You know, you can't have them congregate. So you're constantly--people forget. They're not doing it intentionally. People are starving for socialization. And when they get to go out and they see their friends, especially in a community a place like mine—you know, I'm very much known as a cheers place, you know, where everyone [laugh] knows your name kind of thing--so everyone is happy to see each other, and their inclination is to say "hi" and go up to them, but they forget. Or "If I get up from the table, I have to put on the mask." "I can't go over there without putting on the mask." "I have to wait here until they take my temperature." "I have to fill out this form before I go inside." And, you know, you're constantly having to play vigilance with all those details.

Bethany Fernandez

And have you ever, like, encountered anyone who hasn't done these things sort of out of more of a malice rather than just, like, "Oh, I've just got to run to the bathroom. Oh, I forgot to put my mask back on" type of thing?

Maribel Gonzalez

Right. Not out of malice, but people get frustrated. And, you know, they don't want to be rude, but they become defiant. So "Oh, it's only for a minute. You know, "I'm only going to stand up, you know, for two seconds. I'm going for a smoke, I'll be right back." Or, you know, "The bathroom is right there, and," you know. And you can't bend the rules. You know, I didn't make them; I just have to follow them. And, you know, I'm constantly having to justify, explain, reiterate, you know, repeat, what the rules are, and, you know, people sometimes get annoyed. And I have had to turn away business with people that are not believers in using masks. And so they don't want to follow the rules. And, you know, I can't risk what could very well be a ten thousand dollar fine, because I've gotten emails that there's no leniency. There's no exceptions, no excuses, that--you know, if a restaurant is found to be violating the rules, it could very well be an automatic ten thousand dollar fine, per offense. And so I've had to turn away business because I can't afford to be nice and, because I need their business, break the rules! I can't do it. So I've had to say "no" to customers and excuse them from the premises.

Bethany Fernandez

Right. And having that, like, big fine must be like a sword hanging over your head—just, like, you can't—you have to make sure everything is perfect.

Maribel Gonzalez

Right.

I guess what I'd want to know is, then: do you know how--like, how would they know if you sort of had an offense? Would it be like they found a picture of your restaurant and, you know, they see that someone's not wearing their mask or is it like they have someone routinely inspect the place? Just sort of how could they know? How could they, like, threaten such a big fine and know that information?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, I mean, you know, they have--I did also get an email that, you know, they have increased the task force of inspectors. So now there are many more inspectors throughout the city in the five boroughs and they're very vigilant—you know, rightly so. We do want to eradicate this illness. And they come in on a routine basis, unannounced, to spot check your place. And, you know, they will look at, you know, the six feet distance, if the employees are wearing their masks, customers, any violation, if you're not enforcing the rules. You're also required to keep a log of not only your employees' daily temperature, but like I said, if anyone that comes in to dine, you have to keep a log of their information. At least one person per party has to provide a contact information. Hopefully, you know, not, but in case of any illness, then they have to be traceable and notified. So they can come in and they can ask, "Let me see your log. Let me see, you know, who's been here today." And as well, most establishments, restaurants also for safety are encouraged to have cameras, indoor and outdoor cameras. And I do have cameras, and they can request to look at your footage. You know, they can check from two weeks back, a month back, yesterday, this afternoon, and so on. And, you know, there's various ways that they can monitor it. And so, you know, you just have to be vigilant to always follow the rules so that you don't have anything to worry about. But it's just more to the list.

Bethany Fernandez

And, just to clarify, did you have some of these cameras before or did you also buy, like, new cameras for the outdoor seating?

Maribel Gonzalez

No, I've always had cameras.

Bethany Fernandez

Okay.

Maribel Gonzalez

I've always had cameras, yes.

Bethany Fernandez

Because I could just imagine that, like...

Maribel Gonzalez

[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

...you know, you might have the cameras, but then you might need more cameras--

Maribel Gonzalez

[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

--for like the outdoor seating.

Maribel Gonzalez

Thank goodness I've always had indoor and outdoor cameras. I have cameras throughout the properties. So, you know, they have always been there. And, you know, luckily, the community—the police in particular—have used my cameras to acquire information for, you know, nearby offenses that they've been able to resolve based on my cameras. So--but, you know, they've always been there. Luckily I've had them for everyone's safety: our employees, other patrons, or any crime, any, you know, theft or anything like that. But, you know, there's a lot of ways that they can check, aside from on-site inspections, if you're following the rules or not.

Bethany Fernandez

Okay. And I guess there has been, like, one big event that has happened in this month and it's the election. Has that, like, affected your business in any way? Like, did you get kind of nervous? Were you thinking about getting the boards? Because I've seen, you know, places, you know, have the boards up and whatnot. What--how was the election sort of affecting your business and sort of, like, what you were thinking about doing for The South of France?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, aside from it being nerve-wracking...[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

[laugh]

Maribel Gonzalez

...I mean, you know, we were worried about, you know, how is it going to affect the business? Are they going to cut funding? You know, are they going to *give* funding? Are they going to pass new rules? You know, will they be riots? Am I going to have to board up my place? You know, do I have to now get added security to avoid, you know, any kind of confrontation with customers debating each other? I mean, you know, it's certainly--thank goodness that nothing

has happened and we're in a very, you know, good community space and we haven't had anything of that kind. However, you know, that was definitely a concern, but we're glad that things turned out the way that they did.

Bethany Fernandez

And I guess this is a good segue for looking towards the future. What do you expect to come? Like, what do you expect to see for the future of The South of France? I know you said things are uncertain, but what could you sort of, like, think of could possibly happen?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, like I said, in staying with the glass always full, I am counting on my community. I'm counting on my longstanding supporters, new faces, to say that, you know, they are with us—not only with us, but with all small businesses, you know, of all kinds. I think it's important that people, you know, realize that, you know, the mom-and-pops is America. That's what it was founded on. And, you know, some things change and some things stay the same. And we hope that people realize that buying local, buying small business, supporting your neighborhood, venturing out into other nearby neighborhoods—it's always worth it. It comes with many hidden surprises and we strive to be worthy of that. And so I, you know, remain positive in that we'll be able to overcome this. I hope that there'll be new legislation so that, you know, we could have another round of maybe PPP, the payment protection plan for employees, a payroll protection plan for employees, because that's already run out so, you know, I'm paying employees from whatever we make. And I'm hoping that we'll be able to have access to more grants—and particularly now in the winter months where we need help to provide things like the heaters, etcetera, to extend the outdoor seating, and especially since, as of November 1st when they did not increase the indoor dining to fifty percent, then we will need help to be able to make people feel comfortable sitting outside to keep them warm, to make up and balance that other additional seating that we were not granted. But I'm hoping that things will turn around for the better. You know, I believe in New York. I especially love and believe in my Bronxites that we will band, we will support. And I think it's only a matter of time. This cannot last forever. We will overcome. We will find a vaccine. We will end this. We will be united. People continue to educate and believe that it's not just about the other guy, that it's them. They are the other guy. We are each other's other guy. And it is all incumbent upon us to have a responsibility to take care of our fellow citizens, our fellow Bronxites. And I think we just can't despair, and we have to have faith and hang on a little longer.

Bethany Fernandez

And just to wrap this up, what would you like people to know about, you know, The South of France? About managing the restaurant? You know, just anything. What would you like people to know about sort of this whole situation?

Maribel Gonzalez

Well, I would like people to understand that, you know, you have to get out of your comfort zone a little bit. You can't operate on fear. You can't stay enclosed. You know, that if you have the capability of being able to buy a meal, buy a meal for someone else, you know, buy a gift

certificate, find places that are following the rules, that are doing the right thing, that need your support and that are worthy and worthwhile. That businesses like mine, speaking for myself, are going the distance to make everyone safe, to keep our staff safe, and that I need help to keep my staff employed! I need help because I have to continue to pay business insurance and business rent and on only twenty-five percent is not enough because these, you know, bills still exist. And the bills don't care that you're only operating on twenty-five percent; you still have to pay all of this. So I would encourage people to say, you know, "Let me order these services. Let me dine in. Let me take out and not be afraid," because, you know, we've overcome so many other things as New Yorkers and we're strong and we're warriors. And so you have to have faith and you have to help us to fight.

Bethany Fernandez

And last but not least, how can people support The South of France? You know, this is like "shameless plug" moment.

Maribel Gonzalez

[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

I know we've done this before, but...[laugh]

Maribel Gonzalez

We're here! South of France, 1800 Westchester Avenue! [laugh] 823-1133! And, you know, we have GrubHub and Uber Eats and Seamless and DoorDash and delivery. You know, and we're open till midnight. We're here seven days a week. I mean, we do everything. We can also deliver platters to families, to events. You know, I mean, there's all kinds of things. And we've been here now officially 24 years this past October. We'll be celebrating on December 9th which was declared the official day for The South of France in the Bronx. When we had our 20th year anniversary, the Bronx borough president Ruben Diaz Jr. gave us a proclamation to declare that December 9th is officially The South of France Day in the Bronx. And we're going to have all kinds of specials that day. But don't wait till then; support us now! Support all your local small businesses. And please help us to stay here because we're a community place. We're not just about us. We're about helping our place. And don't forget, our motto is, "We do it all for you." [laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

It's always a pleasure. [laugh] It is always a pleasure to talk with you, Ms. Gonzalez. And thank you again—

Maribel Gonzalez

Thank you.

--for coming and talking and spend--just taking a little bit of your day out just to have a conversation with me. I greatly appreciate it. And I--

Maribel Gonzalez

Thank you so much. It was my pleasure.

Bethany Fernandez

And you know, I love The South of France just as much as you, so...

Maribel Gonzalez

[laugh]

Bethany Fernandez

Thank you so much!

Maribel Gonzalez

Thank you so much. I appreciate everyone. Stay well. Stay blessed. Happy Veterans Day. We salute you. We have specials for you today if you want to stop by. And God bless you all. Adios y gracias.