

# Food truck lottery winners to serve Norfolk next week

For the winners, the food truck lottery was a jackpot.

The city on Monday used a simple game of bingo to award six permits and open downtown Norfolk to the trendy mobile diners.

In all, 15 trucks were in the running. The six winners were Hubcap Grill, Gnae's Taste of Soul, Bobby Q, Diesel Foods, Mister Softee and Twisted Sisters Cupcakes & Sugar Shack Cafe.

Existing businesses were essentially granted priority status, guaranteeing spaces for the two established Norfolk trucks: Hubcap Grill and Gnae's.

Norfolk also used a lottery to award five downtown pushcart permits: Hot Diggity Dog, Dee's Hotdogs, Granby Bistro, Bobby Q and Brickhouse Catering.

The vendors will start serving Monday.

"Amazing, guys," said Cassandra Ayala, co-owner of Twisted Sisters.

"It happened," replied Evan Harrell, owner of Hubcap Grill.

The two winners high-fived. But for some, Monday's lottery tasted a lot like defeat.

Carla Hesseltine, owner of Just Cupcakes, a Virginia Beach business, applied for one of the spots. In an email, she said she did not attend the lottery but sent a representative. She said she was disappointed to lose, but the process seemed fair.

"It is unfortunate that there wasn't a 'wildcard' spot," she said. "Guess bingo isn't my game."

Ron Williams, assistant city manager, said the lottery format was the fairest he could find. It's how Boston awards its food truck permits, and that city has been one of the country's most successful at introducing the trucks without acrimony, Williams said.

Each truck will start in one space and then rotate on a weekly basis for lunch. The spaces will be on Freemason Street near Granby Street, Plume Street at MacArthur Square, Bank Street near MacArthur Square, and north of Brambleton Avenue on Granby. Food trucks typically rely on social media to alert patrons to their whereabouts.

Monday's drawing was the culmination of years of advocating and many months of debate. The City Council approved a compromise in May intended to appease food truck owners and restaurateurs,

but there remains skepticism on both sides.

"My concern is whether the locations and density are enough for them to succeed," said Kevin Murphy,

president of the Downtown Norfolk Civic League.

Restaurant owners have said they're concerned that there are not enough customers to support restaurants and mobile vendors. Many also view food trucks as having an unfair advantage.

Norfolk has been the hardest city to break into, Ayala said. As a result, there's a lot of pressure on the selected food trucks to serve quality fare and work well with the community. What the vendors do now is crucial, she said.

"Now I've got to go bake," said Tracy Busching, Ayala's business partner.

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