



## **Bartleby's Seitan Stand**

### **Quarterly Update**

**October 2019**

Service Period: July-September 2019

## SUMMARY

Our summer quarter was full of ups and downs. We slung seitan at music festivals, sold out sessions of our red-hot Seitan School, battled our finicky and rage-inducing generator, and got a foothold on new ways to distribute nuggets and patties. Numbers are high, and so are our spirits as we move closer to the end of the calendar year.

## OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During this quarter in operation (July-September 2019), Bartleby's Seitan Stand accomplished the following:

### *Sales*

We are booming! We again hit a new record number of meals served at 5,700 (totaled from 9,396 individual items sold). That's a staggering 39% increase from last quarter and a 43% increase from the same period last year. Our average ticket price dipped slightly to \$12.29 (previously \$12.56), even with some increased item pricing (like the "extra" dollar in the price of the Nashville Hot, our September special—more on that below).

Our top three menu items are sweet potato fries, the Wee & Wicked (five-piece nuggets), and the Spicy Deluxe sandwich. This is the first quarter that nuggz have placed in the top tier, and we hope they stay that way.

We created monthly specials for July, August and September, and these limited-time menu items have generated a healthy portion of our sales.

- **Seoul-ful BBQ and Sesame Slaw** (July): A Korean BBQ-style patty (sweet, salty, and a bit spicy) includes sesame oil, ginger, and sriracha. It's piled with a bright sesame slaw, crisp cabbage, broccoli, scallions, and carrots. 316 portions sold (15% of monthly sales).
- **El Diablo** (August): A fiery salad that starts with a bed a mixed greens. Then we stack on strips of our spicy seitan with black beans, corn, pickled jalapenos, tomatoes, and tortilla crisps. And *then*, we drizzle it with a scratch-made chipotle ranch sauce. 122 portions sold (8% of monthly sales).
- **The Nashville Hot** (September): A nod to the original spicy fried chicken sandwich created by Prince's Hot Chicken in Nashville. We've slathered our crispy fried patty in a scratch-made

cayenne sauce, with a little maple and brown sugar to balance the heat. Just pickles on top and our favorite Pretzilla bun to hold everything together. 250 portions sold (16% of monthly sales).

One dollar from every Nashville Hot sandwich sold was set aside to donate to the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts. BECMA works to improve the quality of life for communities of color by fighting for policies that increase the participation of minority-owned businesses in the economy and create greater access to good, permanent jobs. Bartleby's is a new, small business, but giving back is a priority, and we were proud to send \$250 to BECMA at the end of the month.

We set a 2019 goal to reach a total of 15,000 meals served. At the end of this quarter, we are ahead of schedule (just over 9,800 and counting) and aim to meet or exceed our goal by the end of the calendar year.

### *Social Media, Website, and Publicity*

The gains across our three social channels during the summer months were modest:

Instagram: 12% growth (3,354 to 3,741 followers)

Facebook: 9% growth (1,237 to 1,351 followers)

Twitter: 7% growth (406 to 433 followers)

We are working toward social goals that we had revised last quarter, aiming to gather 4,200 followers on Instagram, 1,500 on Facebook, and 500 on Twitter.

We keep our marketing email frequency low, usually distributing a newsletter just once monthly, and occasionally sending another blast when we have extra special news (like an award nomination). This thoughtful pace has not worn out our welcome with subscribers—our engagement levels with email messaging is high. Over this July-September span, our open rate averaged 45% (compared to restaurant industry averages of 20-26%) and our click rate ranged 5-12% (compared to 1-3.5%). We began the quarter with 388 subscribers, and gained 13% of that figure, working now with 439 names.

### *Events Completed*

During this quarter in operation, Barleby's scheduled participation at 12 special events, which include music and theatre festivals, markets, and brewery pop-ups. We cancelled just one brewery pop-up due to illness, and most tragically cancelled our highly anticipated Devil's Day at the end of September due

to our cursed generator. More on this below. Otherwise, we had a successful string of seitan slinging, and were especially fruitful during our visits to Mighty Squirrel Brewing Co. in Waltham, MA, where we will return again in October.

- July 3: Turtle Swamp Brewing, Jamaica Plain
- July 12: Turtle Swamp Brewing, Jamaica Plain > *cancelled, illness*
- July 14: Sad Summer Festival, Worcester
- July 26: Shakespeare on the Common, Boston
- August 3: Shakespeare on the Common, Boston (2 performances)
- August 11: Summer Bikes & Bites, Lexington
- August 25: Taste of Stoneham, Stoneham
- September 7: Self Help Festival, Worcester
- September 8: Pet Rock Festival, Grafton
- September 13: Mighty Squirrel Brewing Co.
- September 28: Devil's Day, Cambridge > *cancelled, mechanical issues*

For the larger events and festivals, we post a recap on our blog. Readers are welcome to visit our website to see some photos and get the on-site report from our fearless leader, Stephanie.

### *General Business*

Much of our focus this quarter has been on streamlining kitchen and service processes. We work to reduce the customer wait time by fine-tuning the flow of the kitchen and clarifying staff responsibilities from the moment an order is placed to the moment the seitan lands in hungry devil hands. One example of a kitchen improvement is a nugget failsafe. We hand-bread all of our seitan, and nuggets, which are small and plentiful, take a lot of time to bread individually. We began to pre-bread a portion of nuggets as we set up the truck, so when a rush occurs, we can more quickly get the breaded nuggz into the fryer, and don't fall behind on orders.

We added a couple new truck teamsters this fall, but hope to keep a regular staff in place—a group who can reliably run the truck during service days, and give Stephanie a chance to expand work in other areas of the business.

If you read our Quarterly Update at the close of 2018, you'll know that Bartleby's wanted to reduce the number of service cancellations. We had 50 services scheduled between July and September (including both regular weekday service and special pop-ups and events), and lost just 5 of those due to one sick

day and then some mechanical issues (mostly centered on our demonic generator). That's a 90% successful service rate, a slight increase from last quarter's 87%.

We scheduled the inaugural Devil's Day for Saturday, September 28. We have weekly lunch service in Harvard Square on Saturdays, and had chosen the 28th as a day to give thanks to all our amazing and supportive customers, and to welcome new devils to the fold. Prior to the 28th, we had given away special merchandise or provided free food specials during each service period. Stephanie and her kitchen team had prepped hundreds and hundreds of portions of seitan and picked a special menu for Devil's Day. To our great dismay, upon arrival in Harvard Square, the generator on the truck blew out! Ugh. It was a great blow, and we felt like we had disappointed so many people. But the community rose up with a sea of kind comments and encouragement, and warmed our little devil hearts. We plan to either reschedule the event, or refashion it in early 2020.

We held two more sessions of our Seitan School in August (deemed the Seitan Summer School) and reached sell-out for both within a week of opening the registration. We're delighted to learn that our devils are interested in our cooking program, and that our Stoneham kitchen is a convenient space for students. Three more sessions are scheduled for the fall.

### *Reviews and Recognition*

A selection of recent online reviews, plus feedback provided via our point-of-sale system, Square:

- Absolutely the best vegan food in the city. (Facebook)
- This is the best fried seitan I've tried yet. (Google)
- This food truck is what my vegetarian dreams are made of! (Yelp)
- Absolutely loved this place! I am a life-long vegetarian who had never tried seitan before. (Yelp)
- Literally a 10. My boyfriend and I love all vegan food but this was something else. The nuggets were perfectly crispy, fluffy, flavorful... I could go on about these vegan nugs. (Yelp)
- I am not a vegan, but I gave Bartleby's a try and I was knocked out by how good the nuggets were! (Yelp)
- Delicious, guilt-free vegan food with amazing sauces. Comfort food for animal lover. (Google)

## OUR GOALS

### *Sales*

We continue our work toward a “50/50” sales goal for 2019. We want to increase our sales in two areas by 50% as compared to 2018:

- **Sales per shift.** Last year, we aimed to reach 100 orders (or sales) per shift on the food truck. In 2019, we’re aiming for 150 orders per shift. Last quarter, we operated at the 100-120 range on clear weather days. This quarter, despite once hitting that 150 mark, we are serving at the 80-100 range.
- **Meals served.** In 2018, Bartleby’s served over 10,000 meals. In 2019, we aim to increase that number to 15,000. Meals served are counted as orders fulfilled on the food truck (during weekday service and for special events), pick-up orders fulfilled, and the equivalent proportions of food moved during private catering events. Current stats are hovering close to 10,000; we are on pace to meet our annual goal.

We are also watching our speed of sales. In 2018, truck staff used an average of 60 seconds to fulfill an order. Last quarter, we reduced that average rate to 40 seconds per order, and have maintained that speed through the current quarter.

### *Menu*

Monthly specials are fun for our staff (conceiving a new item and executing it with particular ingredients for a short period) and they are an excellent tool for keeping our followers and customers engaged. Bartleby’s Seitan Stand is always on the move, and we want our devils to feel that the effort of finding us was worth their time. Having a chance to catch a short-lived special sandwich lends good feelings, and we receive a lot of feedback on these items. The top five specials of 2019, in terms of sales, will be brought back in 2020, along with new creations.

### *General Business*

With the truck running smoothly, we can turn some of our focus to finding additional revenue streams during the winter months (when our truck will be largely or entirely off the road). In the near term, we will launch online ordering and delivery of frozen versions of our products. You may know that we currently offer large, batched ordering for our nuggets and sauce. These orders can be picked up from our commissary or at the truck during regular service periods. Frozen nuggets (and patties) can be

stored longer than the fresh versions, and providing shipping means that we can get our southern-fried seitan to customers all over the country.

Other projects that are open for the Bartleby's team include:

- Acquiring Woman-Owned Small Business certification, which would make it easier for us to access certain resources and programs to grow our business
- Acquiring Kosher certification, which officially designates our food as compliant with the strict kosher laws of purity and quality
- Launching retail of fresh products and merchandise at our commissary, Food rEvolution in Stoneham
- Launching retail of frozen products at local shops, stores, and markets
- Expanding the offerings of our drop-off catering program, with additional menu options and new packaging to ensure the highest quality of our food upon delivery

## **CLOSING**

September was a hard month, with its mechanical troubles and the loss of Devil's Day. The emotional toll seemed particularly high after such a rollicking good time in July and August. Still, we soldiered on like good little devils, and have been able to meet our original, smaller sales targets and remain on track to meet our larger calendar goals. Stephanie has made great traction on new streams of revenue that will allow us to feed more people using our currently existing facilities and staff, and our customer reach will increase beyond the radius of our food truck locations. It is vital to Bartleby's that its food remain delicious and affordable for customers as our geographic reach expands; we are being deliberate about our choices in packaging, partners, POS systems, and product development. We're grateful for your support during our second year of business, and can't wait to show you how that support has enabled us to grow.