

## Alcohol to go? Nebraskans serve differing post-pandemic views

Written by Alex McLoon

OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - The pandemic has been do or die for bars and restaurants.

Katie Mock co-owns the long-time Blackstone bar Nite Owl, which she says saw the peak of its success just before coronavirus distanced businesses from customers. Mock and her husband opened Fizzy's Fountain and Liquors one week before the March shutdown.

"One way we can reach new people and they can still try Fizzy's is the to-go drinks."

Mock says carryout cocktails have kept her latest venture alive during the pandemic. But state officials are expected to rule on-to-go alcohol orders later this year. Some aren't sure it should last beyond the pandemic.

"It's gave up options and gave us additional revenue," Mock said. "It continues to be successful."

If Fizzy's and Nite Owl didn't have the option to offer to-go alcohol containers, she says her retro-style cocktail lounge probably wouldn't have made this far.

When the state legislature meets this year, the Nebraska Restaurant Association is expected to push for the expansion of carryout cocktails when the pandemic wanes.

Bar owners like Mock want to keep serving alcohol to-go beyond the COVID-19 era.

But not everyone's sold on the idea. Groups with concerns about excessive drinking have already contacted the governor's office.

"In no way should we be weakening our laws without a really thorough assessment on the impact on public health," said Erin Ayad, associate director of Project Extra Mile.

Ayad says the CDC data it sent to the governor's office reveals excessive drinking kills more than 95,000 Americans each year. The waiver for to-go cocktails extends until the end of the pandemic.

"We have high numbers with regard to drunken driving," Ayad said. "We rank second in the nation for self-reported drunken driving."

How do you regulate getting these to-go cocktails to their final destination? The state's restaurant association proposed putting seals on caps to indicate when they've been opened.

Whether to-go drinks are here to stay is up to state officials.

The state restaurant association proposed ending carryout drinks at some point. The legislature starts its first session of the new year on Wednesday.