

Café competition in Bryant Park heats up

New lounge could open next year as part of Ark Restaurant's empire while Southwest Porch mulls permanence.

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Photo by Katherine Kritzalis

Bryant Park Corp. is planning to open a new cocktail lounge next summer in the midtown oasis.

The organization is in discussion with Ark Restaurants, which runs Bryant Park Grill and Café, to create a lounge behind the New York Public Library.

“We don't yet how it would work,” said BPC president Dan Biederman. The idea, however, is to build on the popularity of the piano jazz performances that take place there each afternoon. The lounge would serve cocktails in the evening.

“There is a bit of a lounge-like atmosphere forming,” added Mr. Biederman, referring to the music program.

Meanwhile, Southwest Porch, the new café/lounge that opened on the opposite side of the park two weeks ago has been so well received that its hours are being extended.

Operated by and built around Tom Colicchio's wiccraft kiosk, Southwest Porch will begin serving lunch on Thursday. It will extend its table service to the weekends as well. Previously it offered table service only on weekday evenings.

The airline made its culinary foray into the city to promote its newly launched routes from La Guardia Airport to Baltimore and Chicago. The lounge is expected to close after Labor Day, but BPC, Tom Colicchio's management and the airline are talking about extending their partnership.

“Most of the parties are interested in keeping it going,” said Jeffrey Zurofsky, a partner in wickcraft. The airline invested about \$500,000 in the space, installing Adirondack chairs, chaise lounges, a bar and swinging benches—which are available to park goers during park hours and are permanent additions to the park.

The longer lease on life may not be welcomed by Bryant Park Grill, which also operates an outdoor café in the park. Michael Weinstein, chief executive of Ark Restaurants, said, “in its present configuration, it doesn’t pose a problem for us.”

He declined to comment on how Southwest might affect Bryant Park Grill and its outdoor café if it continued beyond the summer, but he clearly he’s made mention of the issue to BPC.

“We have told Michael,” said Mr. Biederman, “that [Southwest Porch] won’t get bigger.”

Like all outdoor restaurants in the city, Bryant Park Café has had a difficult spring and early summer because of the rainy weather. It has “been underutilized,” said Mr. Weinstein.