



## *The Journal*



# New Normal; Boucheé Patisserie in Houston is open, what they're doing to keep you safe



Model: Beth Muecke, Photo by Cassidy Bash

Houston July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020; Flight to Paris Canceled? Don't be mad. In a Parisian state of mind and craving something sweet? Look no further than the Boucheé Patisserie, a new Uptown confectionery at 1600 West Loop South, in the lobby of the Post Oak Hotel.

Led by an award-winning pastry chef and serving up "both traditional and extravagant Parisian-inspired indulgences with a modern twist," the new patisserie promises an assortment of decadent macaroons, house-made bonbons, cakes, gelato, quiches, handcrafted chocolates and specialty coffee on its website.

Boucheé Patisserie's decor is refined and welcoming, with French-style seating; pops of deep coral, mint green and lavender; and orbs of light hanging from above in a swirl design.

Angie M., who was the first Yelper to review the new spot on April 3rd, said, "This place is like magic. It is located inside the Post Oak at Uptown Houston. ...I love every thing about this place—great design, great food. I can't wait to the next time I go to this wonderful bakery."

New Normal;

Intrigued? Stop in to try it for yourself and see how they are handling the new Normal. First and foremost there's Employee Screenings & Health Practices; 'We will be screening our employees daily. If they have a temperature exceeding 100 degrees or are experiencing flu like symptoms, they will be required to stay home until they are symptom free, without the use of medication, for 72 hours and satisfy all CDC requirements prior to returning to work. We will allow our staff to wear face masks and or at the request of the guest and practice enhanced measures such as frequent hand washing and sanitizing'.

Social Distancing - Necessary steps will be taken to ensure that we are encouraging social distancing including spacing seated tables as required by each state. Signage will be posted in each location to further encourage these practices in the entry area as well as restrooms. Temporary high traffic areas such as playgrounds will be closed where applicable.

Enhanced Sanitizing and Disinfecting - All areas of the property will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized daily. In addition, we will continue to regularly cleaned and sanitized high touchpoint areas including door handles, chairs, tables, restrooms, handrails, etc.

Dining Enhancements - Restaurants will offer disposable menus and no-touch menu options to our diners. Additional sanitization steps will be implemented for condiments and utensils. Hand sanitization will be provided for guests at the entry of each location.

[www.thepostoakhotel.com/restaurants/bouchee-patisserie/](http://www.thepostoakhotel.com/restaurants/bouchee-patisserie/)



Bouchee' interior

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## Refrigeration Contractors Expect COVID-19 to Bring Change

July 4, 2020 by Joanna R. Turpin posted on [www.archnews.com](http://www.archnews.com)

Safety and sanitation are now primary concerns, and more employees expected to work from home  
Restaurant Refrigeration Maintenance

The COVID-19 pandemic shut down many "non-essential" businesses for several months, but this did not include supermarkets and other food retailers, most of which were busier than ever. Restaurants, on the other hand, either closed completely or else shifted to curbside/takeout service only. As a result, contractors report that while they have been kept busy servicing and maintaining refrigeration systems in grocery stores, restaurant work has slowed down considerably.



Now that shoppers are no longer stripping supermarket shelves bare and restaurants are beginning to reopen in certain parts of the

country, life is getting back to normal. Or, rather, a new normal, as the pandemic has likely forever changed how businesses operate — including refrigeration contractors.

### **Grocery Stores and Refrigeration**

CoolSys, a refrigeration and HVAC services company based in Southern California that provides service to companies all across North America, was extremely fortunate in that so many of its customers were designated as essential businesses and, therefore, remained open to serve the public during the pandemic. This included grocery retailers, convenience stores, drug stores, and cold-storage facilities, said Mike Ochoa, executive vice president of sales and marketing at CoolSys.

CoolSys technician.

**PROPER PPE:** CoolSys will continue to focus on the health and safety of its employees and customers, which means technicians will be utilizing PPE for the foreseeable future.

### **CLOSED DOWN:**

If a restaurant closed down, EMR technicians, such as Dave Fitch, made sure the equipment was turned off properly, usually starting with the walk-in coolers or freezers.

“The demand for service and maintenance for these essential businesses has not slowed during the pandemic,” he said. “Some installation projects, such as remodels and new facilities, have been delayed, while others have gone on as planned; it all depends on the state and local stay-at-home policies in place. We have been busy installing sneeze guards at checkout stands and counters and replacing and/or upgrading HVAC filters to add another level of protection. We are also talking with customers about refrigerated case cleaning and ensuring the proper amount of outside air and ventilation.”

While most of CoolSys’ customers allowed technicians to perform regular maintenance, there were a few that delayed their normal spring preventative maintenance due to the pandemic, said Ochoa.

“We are recommending that all customers allow their planned maintenance to be executed to avoid future maintenance expenses, equipment downtime, and dissatisfied customers during the summer months,” he said. “While we have not seen customers investing in new equipment or controls yet, there is a lot of discussion about MERV 13 and HEPA filters and UV lighting as added protection against bacteria and viruses.”

Business has remained steady at Almcoe Refrigeration, which has offices in Dallas, Tyler, and Lufkin, Texas, and specializes in the service, maintenance, and installation of commercial refrigeration systems, as well as construction of cold storage facilities. Bill Almquist, president and CEO of the company, said that they have not seen a big increase in service calls since the start of the pandemic, but he expects to see a lot more business later this year.

“The grocery store business has made a lot of money over the last few months, and we are now seeing our customers releasing big capital expenditure jobs out for bid,” he said. “They have a big influx of capital, but their equipment has been used hard these last few months. So, while we don't see the increase in business right now, we're expecting to see it in the third quarter this year.”

To prepare for this uptick, Almquist is busy putting together proposals and conducting equipment surveys for customers. He is also talking with grocery store customers about increased sanitation, which involves coming in afterhours to wash equipment, as well as upgrading their control systems to ensure food quality.

“We've also seen a desire for more cold areas for grocery pickup, for when customers order online and then pick up their orders,” he said. “Some grocery stores want larger coolers in the back room as well for similar purposes. On the cold storage side, we were already seeing four major players planning large facilities, so we see a boom in that business as well. We believe that the way America goes grocery shopping is going to fundamentally change, so stores may even get smaller. They may transition to more of a warehouse-type situation instead of an actual retail store, so orders can be processed more quickly for delivery or pickup.”

## **The Restaurant Market**

The Electric Motor Repair Company (EMR), which has five locations across the mid-Atlantic, including Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Virginia, and West Virginia, provides service, repairs, parts, and installation to the commercial kitchen service sector. As a result of the pandemic, most restaurant owners cancelled or scaled back on maintenance agreements with the company. Only a few restaurants stayed open, and most were in healthcare facilities, nursing homes, and federal government buildings, said Don Jones, the refrigeration service supervisor at EMR.

**POSTPONING SERVICE:** Jamison Johnson, a refrigeration service supervisor at EMR, works on a walk-in cooler. As a result of the pandemic, most restaurant owners either cancelled or scaled back service.

“We received a lot of service calls to come and shut down refrigeration equipment in restaurants,” he said. “When we are called out to do this, our first step is to make sure there is no food left inside. This seems very obvious, but it does happen when customers unplug a unit and don't check to see if it's empty.”

After throwing out any remaining food, Jones and his techs start with the walk-in coolers or freezers. At the condensing unit, they pump down the system to store the refrigerant in the receiver. Next, they turn off the power to the unit, and if it is water-cooled, they also shut off the water.

“Keeping the doors open will help reduce mold growth,” he said. “Our techs then do a check of the entire system, and if the doors need new gaskets or coils need to be cleaned, for example, we tell the customer that we will take care of it when they reopen. We turn off the ice machines and remove any water in the sump and shut off the water, and we also make a note of any filters that need to be changed. When we return to start it up again, we clean and sanitize the machine.”

Verlon Wulf, president of Carolina Cool Inc. in Surfside Beach, South Carolina, noted that while most corporate restaurants closed, many mom-and-pop restaurants remained open, primarily offering takeout.

“They still needed their ice machines and coolers serviced and cleaned,” he said. “Overall, though, commercial work has greatly declined, simply because many businesses, restaurants, and hotels were closed. Restaurants are starting to reopen, though, so we expect to have a rush on getting that equipment back up and running. We have been pushing IAQ seriously since this started, and we see that there is more interest in touch surfaces being disinfected, UV lights, and better filtration, which are all becoming the norm. Businesses that are reopening can gain confidence knowing their environment is as clean as possible.”

### **Silver Linings During The Crisis**

While the pandemic has caused economic concerns in just about every business, there have been a few silver linings. For example, Joe Kokinda, president and CEO at Professional HVACR Services Inc. in Avon Lake, Ohio, noted that over the last few months, he has had additional time to work on marketing, and more people are returning his calls.



## Professional HVACR Services Inc. Technician.

SHIFTING SCHEDULES: Some clients at Professional HVAC/R Services Inc. are shifting construction projects, such as the changeout of refrigeration units that Joe Kokinda, vice president and COO is working on here, to later this year.

“Decision makers seem to not ghost us as much, as they are also working from home,” he said. “This is a pleasant surprise and has led to advanced talks on our agenda. Pain points are easily discussed, and these players find it easier to stay focused on solutions.”

For Wulf, any economic downturn offers the opportunity to focus more on opportunities for the company.

“A recession is a great opportunity to trim fat, sharpen your operation, and take advantage of opportunities that may have been previously ignored,” he said. “It also makes you think more about which people to keep, which to let go, how to become more efficient, where are we spending money, and where should we spend more.”

But concerns linger, and Almquist is especially worried about whether the pandemic will worsen or else resurface as a second wave later this year.

“There is a lot of economic uncertainty out there, and I am definitely keeping my powder dry, which means continuing to have minimal debt on the company,” he said. “We're not doing any capital expenditures, and we're conserving resources as much as possible. We were already pretty conservative, but now we're really, really conservative. We are also much more mindful about personal protection equipment (PPE) and handwashing. It's just a way of life now.”



## **HVACR Technician.**

In addition to stressing the use of PPE and frequent handwashing, Jones now encourages any of his technicians who might be feeling under the weather to not come into work.

“If anyone even thinks they are getting sick, we say ‘stay home,’” he said. “More of our office staff work from home now, because they are afraid of coming in contact with other people. Companywide meetings have been either postponed or cancelled, and I think some good ideas will get lost because of this.”

Another change is that training has moved online and will likely stay there for the foreseeable future. Jones is not sure that this is beneficial, because most technicians learn through hands-on training.

“Business travel has all been cancelled. Conferences have been cancelled. A lot of our techs travel to factories for training. All cancelled,” he said. “I am also an instructor in the HVACR field, and we have switched to online learning. For me, personally, this has been a real challenge, as some of my students are seeing things for the first time. Being able to see something up close in your hand is a lot different than looking at a picture of it.”

Focusing on the health and safety of employees, customers, and their customers’ customers, will continue to be the priority, said Ochoa, noting that CoolSys will continue to take every necessary precaution to protect everyone during these challenging, unprecedented times. This intense focus on safety and sanitation will become part of operating norms and will continue to lead to more automated and touchless interactions and business processes, he said.

“In addition, the successes that many companies, including ours, are experiencing with almost 100 percent of leadership and administrative staffs working remotely/from home will most certainly lead to more and more jobs being ‘acceptably’ performed remotely, which will also change the way companies recruit and hire talent going forward,” he said. “Additionally, there will be more pressure on our engineers to ensure that HVACR systems are designed not only for effectiveness and efficiency, but that they include the latest technologies from a sanitization and safety standpoint. There is no question that this pandemic will permanently change all businesses going forward.”



361 Beach Road, Burlingame, CA 94010

Tel: 855.885.2400 | 650.342.2400 | Fax: 650.342.7400 | [www.oscartek.com](http://www.oscartek.com)