

# CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS®

VOL. XXVI, NO. 50 WWW.CRAINSNEWYORK.COM

## It's midnight, time to grab a bite

Restaurants stay open late, fill nightlife void

BY LISA FICKENSCHER

### Community boards hold power

THE LATE-NIGHT DINING rage is also attracting the attention of a less amenable group: community boards, which can make it difficult for restaurants to get liquor license approval. Boards are primarily concerned about bars and lounges, which tend to attract a rowdier clientele. But restaurants have gotten caught up in the clash between neighborhood residents and bar owners.

Community Board 2, for example, recently gave its seal of approval to Ideal Food and Drink, a casual spot on West Eighth Street opening in early 2011, but only after the owners agreed to adjust the hours. Co-owner Timothy Barry says Ideal will close at midnight Monday through Thursday, two hours earlier than on the weekend. The board also recommended that the State Liquor Authority restrict the eatery to serving just beer and wine.

"I wanted to be able to serve cocktails, and I wanted to be open until 2 a.m. seven days a week," Mr. Barry says. "There is money to be made in the wee hours."

Michael Chernow, co-owner of the Meatball Shop, would agree. The hot spot, which serves custom-order meatballs, sliders and heroes, generates a quarter of its revenues after 2 a.m.

"People make us a destination after the clubs and bars," Mr.

Chernow says. "They order a ton of food and drinks, and our kitchen is going until 4 a.m." Late hours are central to the Meatball Shop's business plan, he says, as the average check per person is just \$16. "In order to be profitable, we need to stay open as long as we can."

The Meatball Shop's enormous popularity is rubbing off on its neighbors. Sales at Epstein's, a 7-year-old bar and hamburger joint next door, are up 25% since the Shop opened 10 months ago. "Customers will have a couple of drinks here, while they wait for their tables next door," says Erik McManus, Epstein's owner.

Restaurateurs are making an extra effort to be good neighbors and avoid a tussle with community boards.

The Lion has a full-time doorman to control the noise outside its building. "He keeps the smokers from congregating, the cabs from honking and the cars moving—so that they don't double-park," Mr. DeLucie says.

Nightclubs are also noting the late-dining trend. Mr. Seres is opening two clubs in the fashion district in which he plans to build full kitchens that will serve until 2:30 a.m. At his previous club, Sol, food-cart vendors set up outside to feed ravenous partiers.

Now, he says, "I don't want my customers leaving if they get hungry." ■