

Uptown Social is more than a sports bar. With Bodega, The Lot, a rooftop terrace and two private events rooms, their 10,000 square foot establishment is a daily destination.

“I think we came into this thinking we were a sports bar and now we’re almost like an entertainment venue,” says Kara Graves, Operating Partner at Uptown Social.

“I don’t even know what you would call us. We’re not a club but we have DJs. We’re not solely an events venue, but we do host private events and have even had a wedding here. We’re really a one stop shop for an experience.”

So What Is The Uptown Social Experience?



The Lot at Uptown Social

Costume parties and masquerades held throughout the year. Invite-only parties with speciality drinks from their bartenders. Karaoke on Wednesdays. Silent discos on Thursdays.

Uptown Social is exactly what we’ll need once this pandemic is over.

“Silent discos were a huge hit,” says Kara. “You’d come in, get your headphones and switch channels to a different DJ. There were three different color coded DJs, people would be dancing all over the place.”

Their Sunday Funday parties were the most popular. “People would wait for it all week. DJ United would spin on the rooftop, sometimes with the Strawberry Squad, sometimes with violinist Seth G who would play along to the DJ’s mix.”

“Occasionally Andy [partner of Uptown Social], who has his own band in NYC, would come down and play the trumpet with him. Then at 7pm Midnight City would go on and play until 10pm and the crowd would switch from one direction to another.”

“To compete with the beach and the boats is really hard to do and we somehow figured it out,” says Kara. “We’re always thinking of things to reinvent the vibe.”

Although their events have slowed down and sized down this year, Uptown Social has found a way to always deliver a good time. Their latest projects – Bodega and The Lot – aim to bring a taste of NYC to Charleston.

Bodega At Uptown Social

True to their New York roots, Kara and her partners [Keith Benjamin, Bryn Kelly, Kat Moore and Brian Dodd] realized what Charleston was really missing – a north-east deli concept. As Kara explains, before “you could not get a good New York styled bacon, egg and cheese in this town! What else do you want after a night of drinking?”

Executive Chef and Partner Alec Gropman spearheaded the project, curating a menu reminiscent of New York City bodegas with a space as colorful as Rainbow Row.

Launched in conjunction with The Lot, Bodega provides grab-and-go options while The Lot offers socially distanced outdoor seating. A painted mural and string lights make the perfect backdrop for your weekend brunch photos as the DJ spins.

“The Bodega is still take-out heavy, but people have decided that they really want to dine in and



The Cow a.k.a. The Ultimate Breakfast Sammie



The Arthur Ave Sammie

sit in The Lot, so it switched on us without us even realizing what this was – just adapting to what the customer wants,” says Kara.

What’s To Eat At Bodega?

Open Thursday – Sunday from 8am to 2pm, don’t take your time getting there. On average, Bodega serves up about 150 sandwiches a day and they often sell out. One bite into The Cow, it’s easy to see why.

Recommended by Kara, The Cow is everything you could hope for in a breakfast sandwich. Double layered bacon is cooked to a perfect crisp. Melted American cheese mixes with home fries and a well cooked egg. Chef Alec’s house-made kaiser roll holds it all together. “The kaiser roll is really the star of the show,” says Kara.

Each bite is intentionally curated – a theme that continues throughout their menu. “It’s rare,” says Kara. “In a place that’s this busy, you don’t usually find that kind of attention to flavors and detail in each dish that goes out.”

If it’s your first time at Bodega, you can count on their recommendations. Having never been there myself, I followed Kara’s lead, starting with the Wild Berry Hibiscus Iced Tea. “Do you want a shot of tequila with it?” she asks with a grin.

Though they do serve \$7 half carafes of Mimosas and Bloody Mary’s, don’t sleep on the tea and tequila. Strawberry and blueberry mingle together to create a naturally sweet tea that was meant for something more.



Wild Berry Hibiscus Iced Tea

Stopping in for lunch? Try the Arthur Ave. Chef’s kaiser roll holds up perfectly, absorbing each flavor without becoming soggy.

Grab and Go

If you’re looking for a quick treat, Pastry Chef Marissa Leigh has your back.



THE Bodega Chocolate Chip Cookie

Her house-made cinnamon rolls, Kara’s personal favorite, are large enough to split – though I doubt you’ll want to. Sweet without overwhelming, fluffy yet doughy towards the center, it’s the kind of treat that makes you savor the moment.

Marissa’s Banana Nut Muffin is designed for those who don’t like sweets. Pockets of banana and sliced almonds are complimented by a light crumble, making it the perfect coffee companion.

Craving something sweet with a hint of salt? The S’mores cookie is your go-to. With graham cracker bits and brownie bites folded into the dough and a house-made marshmallow on top, it’s the perfect combination of chewy and crunchy.

The all-star of their baked goods is, of course, the chocolate chip cookie. Filled with chunks of chocolate, it is the staple bodega cookie, perfect for snacking on as you explore the city.

Bodega's pastry specials currently rotate each week as Marissa plays with new flavors and textures, bringing only the best together. Every so often they'll bring something back. The real treat is seeing what Marissa will come up with next.

One thing you can count on week after week? If you get there early enough, you can bring home a half dozen of Chef Alec's kaiser rolls.

Inside Uptown Social

If you're from the tri-state area, you'll feel right at home here. Tin ceilings mix with stained glass details above the bar. "We have an occupancy of 530 [pre-COVID] and over 45 tvs – any sport, any team, there's always a place to sit and watch your actual team," says Kara.

As 2pm approaches and Bodega sells out, order from their pizza menu – a fair rival to Pepe's.

"When we first opened, we hired an international pizza consultant, we were his first contract. He taught us everything he knows about the thin and crispy and made our entire pizza menu," says Kara. Her personal recommendation? The Falco Classic.

Their signature cocktails make spending an afternoon at the bar easy. Try the Grape-full Dead – Titos, house-made grape concord simple syrup, ginger beer and fresh lime. If the Moscow Mule had a cooler older sibling, this is it.

Their Frozé combines Deep Eddy pink grapefruit vodka and rosé, creating a sweet frozen treat perfect for summer sipping.

And if you're not sure what to order, just ask bartender Jamieson Cronin. You won't be disappointed.

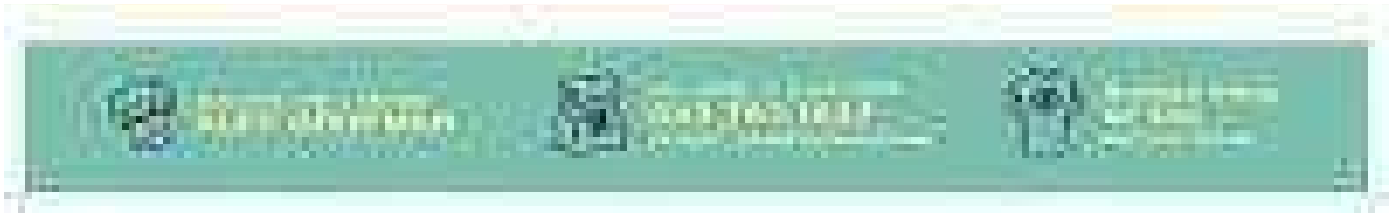
Looking Forward

"The silver lining is, for a long time we were busy and popular but you don't necessarily think of what can be done better because you're operating at such a high level. Then you step back and have the chance to self-reflect – I think once this is over we'll be even better than we were before," says Kara.

To younger managers, she recommends "not to feel like you have to miss out on the rest of your life because you own this business....and don't believe that the work will get done if you don't check it. Be vigilant on what the expectation is."

As for their message to Charleston? "Keep your head up, stay strong, and remember that this is the town that's built on hospitality and tourism. Don't forget it."

The image shows a social media post with a menu. At the top, there are logos for 'Uptown Social & Bodega' and 'Egg Dinners'. The menu is divided into two columns. The left column lists 'Egg Dinners' with items like 'The Breakfast Club', 'The Lunch Club', 'The Dinner Club', and 'The Sweet Club'. The right column lists 'Cakes & Pastries' with items like 'The Sweet Club', 'The Dinner Club', and 'The Lunch Club'. The post also includes a central graphic with the text 'All Goodies Served On Our Party-Favorite Paper Plates' and a 'Sweet Dinners' section at the bottom. The bottom of the image shows social media sharing icons.



The Bodega Menu

By Samantha Paternoster | September 21st, 2020
