

# ORLANDO BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Exclusive: I-Drive businesses join forces to draw locals and boost revenue

Several attractions, restaurants, nightclubs and more along International Drive refuse to wait for travelers to return during the pandemic, and instead have joined forces to create the Orlando Entertainment District in an effort to draw locals to the popular tourist corridor.

The eight I-Drive businesses include:

- ICON Park
- Mango's Tropical Cafe Orlando
- Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition
- Kings Dining & Entertainment
- Pirates Dinner Adventure
- Pirate's Cove Golf
- Ripley's Believe It or Not!
- Sleuth's Mystery Dinner Show



"There is a pent-up demand for high-quality fun, entertainment and dining – even if you're on a budget," said [Chris Jaskiewicz](#), president and CEO of ICON Park, in a prepared statement. "Locals have rediscovered the entertainment value of I-Drive and how easy it is to get here, and they're loving it. About 75% of our guests now are locals, so we want to make sure all our residents know what is available to them here in their own town and state, especially as their out-of-state travel is limited by the pandemic."



[The Entertainment District](#) also features a [new website](#) that connects visitors to the various businesses in the district, nearby hotel accommodations and even information on pandemic safety measures. The businesses will work together to raise awareness and market the roughly 1-mile stretch of I-Drive — from Carrier Drive to Via Mercado — where they are located.

The name "Entertainment District" comes from Orange County's I-Drive 2040 Vision plan that aimed to "create a vibrant, dynamic and safe pedestrian-centered environment with dedicated transit lanes and sidewalk enhancements for local residents, conventioners and visitors alike." That plan, adopted in February 2017 by the county, provided a framework for future development.



The resurgence of the corridor relies on not only plans from the county, but also from local business owners, said **Joshua Wallack**, co-owner of Mango's Tropical Cafe Orlando.

"Covid-19 has changed everything for us, especially in Florida, which leads the nation in historic unemployment numbers not seen since 1933. The volume business in Orlando will suffer for some time, and it behooves entrepreneurs and CEOs to pivot quickly to what they feel are sustainable models that have a pathway out of the 2020-2021 crises," he told *Orlando Business Journal*.



Many businesses along the I-Drive corridor previously told *OBJ* that local visitation will be key to the recovery of Orlando's tourism market. Local and drive-in visitation — travelers from within the state and nearby states like Georgia — are critical to keeping revenue flowing since most air travel is still depressed due to the pandemic.

Targeting locals is a primary strategy right now, said **Maria Triscari**, president and CEO of the International Drive Resort Area Chamber of Commerce.

"With an amazing variety of restaurants, retail and attractions, the I-Drive Entertainment District provides residents with a great, fun-filled escape with good food, great entertainment in an awesome environment," she told *OBJ*.

The chamber also has helped since the pandemic with plans such as the “I-Drive Staycation” campaign, which encourages locals to check out I-Drive's offerings, as well as the chamber's virtual efforts such as "I-Drive Spotlights" that highlight businesses along the corridor offering special discounts to residents and employees.

Added Jaskiewicz: “Orlando has a rich history of vibrant entertainment districts, such as Church Street Station in the 1970-80s, and then Pleasure Island in '90s and early 2000s. We now have what those spots had and more.”

To view the article live, click [here](#).