

Log Cabin Diner relents to public pressure, discontinues dine-in service

May 5, 2020



Editor's Note: The Del Norte County Fair has not been canceled. We received some incorrect information from Supervisor Roger Gitlin that ran in this story. Gitlin has since changed his statement and this story has been updated accordingly.

Ed Salsedo and Sherry Scott just wanted to reopen their Log Cabin Diner to dine-in service so they could pay the bills.

The Yurok Tribe just wanted to keep the elderly, vulnerable population within the reservation in Klamath free of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Three days after first opening the diner, Salsedo told The TriPLICATE today he and Scott have relented to official pressure and will only offer take out dining options.

“We’re going to be doing take out. We’ll do their game for right now,” Salsedo said. “We put a couple tables outside and we welcome people to come order and eat the food outside.”

The decision comes the morning after the Yurok Tribal Police Department, in coordination with the Yurok Tribe’s Incident Command team and Public Health Officer, delivered a cease and desist letter Monday night advising Scott and Salsedo to immediately discontinue a dine-in service.

“We informed the diner owners that they must take the sit-down option off the menu. The letter is one of multiple actions we have taken to prevent this establishment from putting the health and safety of our people in jeopardy,” Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe, said in a press release. “Now, it’s up to them to do the right thing.”

Salsedo said the Log Cabin Diner, located at 301 CA-169 just off U.S. Highway 101 in Klamath, is closed during the winter offseason and usually reopens March 14. The diner was open four days before Gov. Gavin Newsom’s executive order closing restaurants to dine in service to prevent the spread of the coronavirus during the pandemic.

“We thought it was only going to last a month,” Salsedo said. “All of a sudden bills are due. If someone wants to give me \$1,000 a day for being closed, I’d go for it.”

So Salsedo and Scott chose to defy the governor’s mandate and reopened the Log Cabin Saturday, May 2. The decision attracted the attention of both Yurok Tribe officials and Del Norte County officials. Del Norte County Public Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt visited the diner to apprise Salsedo and Scott of possible violations they were facing. Rehwaldt gave them a letter their services were in violation of California Health and Safety Code 120275. He provided a written statement of his concerns.

“That section states ‘any person who, after notice, violates, or who, upon the demand of any health officer, refuses or neglects to conform to, any rule, order, or regulation prescribed by the department respecting a quarantine or disinfection of persons, animals, things or places, is guilty of a misdemeanor,” Rehwaldt wrote in his notice to the owners. “The penalty for such violation is described in Health and Safety Code 120295. You may be fined up to a \$1,000 for every day that you are in violation of the code.”

The diner’s opening also attracted the attention of Del Norte County District 1 Supervisor Roger Gitlin, who wrote on his Facebook page he and his wife Angie would be attending and encouraged others to join them.

“I was just a person who wanted to come and support a business,” Gitlin told The Triplicate. “It seems a lot of effort is being made shutting down a viable business that is only trying to make a living in an area with no COVID issue. I’m sorry to see that happen.”

Going on two months into the economic shutdown, Gitlin has been very vocal about the cure to spreading the coronavirus is proving to be worse than the virus itself.

“I’m scratching my head over when we can begin to have a discussion to open our county,” Gitlin said.

“We’re dying on vine. No parade. I’ve heard the fair might not run this year. I’m hopeful that it will run. We

live for summer the months. It's so disheartening the summer will come and go and nothing will have changed."

Gitlin's support on his Facebook page garnered more than 800 heated comments and more than 200 shares as of today. One of the comments was by Gitlin's colleague, District 5 Supervisor Bob Berkowitz, whose constituents include Klamath residents.

"There is one indisputable fact. Tribal law governs actions that take place on the Yurok Reservation. On April 6th, the Yurok Tribal Council closed the reservation to non-essential personnel. This was meant to keep tourists and others out of the area to avoid the spread of COVID-19," Berkowitz wrote. "For businesses to open on the reservation is a direct violation of tribal law and those businesses should be censured in some way. I certainly can't condone the actions of those who open their businesses in violation of tribal law and those who patronize those same businesses."

James also took issue with Gitlin inserting his concerns into an area he does not represent.

"Seeing a sitting supervisor publicly encourage people to disregard Tribal law is disconcerting, especially during a crisis," James said. "We are disappointed in Mr. Gitlin's apparent decision to politicize a threat to the safety of our most vulnerable citizens. It is shameful."

James explained his opposition to the reopening in a press release Sunday. He said as part of a proactive effort to protect those most vulnerable to the illness, the Tribe closed the reservation to non-residents on April 6. He said according to the United Indian Health Services, approximately 60 percent of the tribal citizens living on the reservation are either elders or individuals who have underlying medical conditions. Those with preexisting health issues, such as diabetes, are more prone to experiencing the worst symptoms from the coronavirus, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Gitlin argues that decisions are continued to be made on old data and scare tactics.

"We have people acting irrationally, thinking the air is poisoned," he said, pointing to stores like Home Depot and Walmart remaining open where 250 people can be shopping with and without masks, yet only three cases of the coronavirus have been confirmed.

Salsedo said even though his diner sits on private property, and he pays taxes to Del Norte County. Most of his business comes in the summertime but has also been supported by locals and Tribal members. He said he feels the response to the reopening has been more political than anything else.

"It was more a statement by the Tribe that they're a sovereign nation, you can't defy our rules," Salsedo said. "Most of anger (on Facebook) has been from tribal members. But we still ask for their support. If we go to takeout only, we hope they still support us."