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Vendors drive traffic but rev up operator aggression

BY LISA JENNINGS

When Kenny Lao began selling his restaurant's dumplings out of a converted postal truck last September, he didn't anticipate that competitors would threaten his life because they felt he was encroaching on their territory.

Lao, who co-founded the trendy Rickshaw Dumpling Bar restaurant in the Flatiron neighborhood of Manhattan, also didn't realize the difficulty he'd encounter finding a mobile vendor permit in a city that doesn't issue them anymore, the challenge of ensuring all employees have licenses whether or not they handle food, or the expense of building a kitchen on wheels.

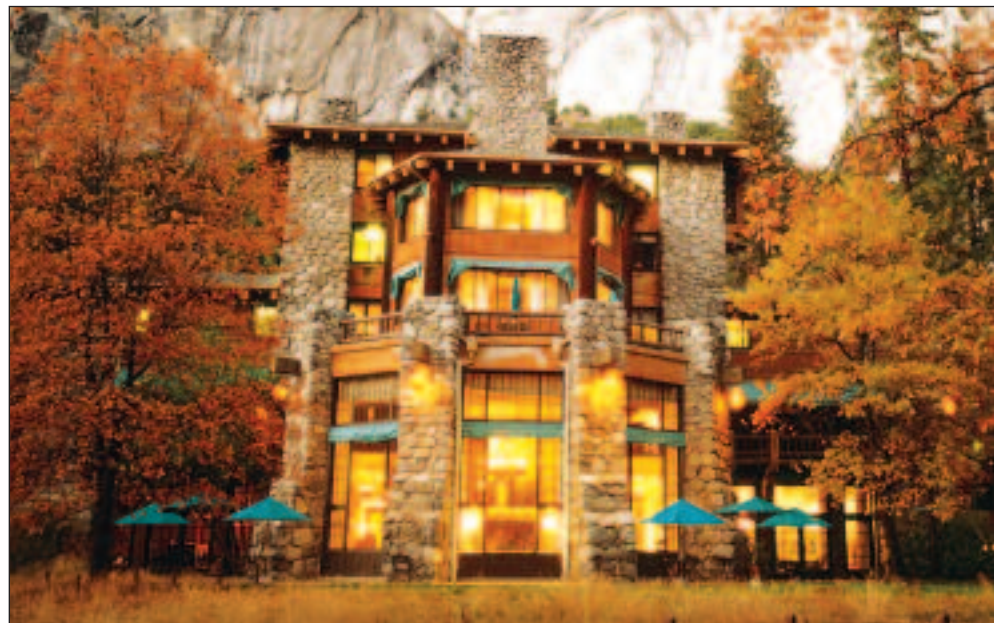
But even as some communities begin

Rickshaw Dumpling Bar sells its food in a converted mail truck throughout New York.



to view mobile food vendors as nuisances leading to crowds and litter, and alleged black markets for permits develop in cities such as New York, the trucks have captured the hearts of consumers. As such, operators still are racing to get into the game despite regulatory and competitive speed bumps and startup costs that can range from \$20,000 to \$160,000.

Among them are Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger, who in late June
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Contractor Delaware North Cos., which operates the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park, is offering special deals on food and lodging in order to spur tourist sales.

Industry still upbeat despite not-so-sunny travel forecast

Restaurateurs see value as way to lure summer vacationers

BY PAUL FRUMKIN

While current forecasts paint a somewhat cloudy picture of this summer's leisure travel business, food-service operators say they

are hopeful that Americans will still hit the road as the days begin to warm up.

The decline in gas prices coupled with a growing sense of optimism about the economy could help fuel an in-

crease in travel, more upbeat observers say. At the same time, while Americans might indeed be clutching their wallets more tightly these days, most are not entirely

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NRA conferencegoers link into social media's potential

BY SARAH E. LOCKYER

CHICAGO — One of the hottest questions in the restaurant industry is "What are you doing?"

Social-networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, MySpace

and LinkedIn have taken over as today's word-of-mouth marketing tools, and restaurateurs are joining the conversation — sometimes in 140 characters or less.

At last month's National



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Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show, celebrity chef Rick

Bayless tweeted to his followers on Twitter just prior to his culinary demonstration, suppliers posted new-product news on websites and Facebook accounts, and a new Chicago-

based restaurant, Sunda, aired a video on YouTube that outlined the restaurant's development and menu philosophy.

"The water cooler keeps moving, and you need to be
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