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NATO summit planners give business owners communications center

Officials say updates, advisories will keep businesses apprised of street closures, locations of demonstrations

By [Kathy Bergen](#), Chicago Tribune reporter

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Chicago's host committee for the NATO summit on Tuesday launched a business communications center to provide security and traffic updates to area enterprises, some of which are feeling jittery.

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The rollout was announced at a briefing for the Illinois Restaurant Association, where some downtown restaurateurs expressed fears customers would avoid downtown during the days leading up to and including the May 20-21 international summit at McCormick Place.

"Every day we're hearing more and more people talking about their employers encouraging them not to come to work, and the people who live down there in Millennium Park are encouraged not to stay in their condos, to stay away," Glenn Keefer, managing partner of Keefer's Restaurant, said during the question portion of the session.

So far, his restaurant is seeing "very little (reservation) activity in the days around this event," he said after the briefing. In contrast, the days around the four-day National Restaurant Association show, which opens Saturday at McCormick Place, are extremely busy, with certain time slots sold out, he said.

Arnette Heintze, chief executive of Hillard Heintze, the firm advising the host committee on business security, told restaurant association members that anyone advising people to stay away from downtown is lacking information.

"That is absolutely incorrect," he told the standing-room-only crowd at the association's offices. "This is a vibrant city. Chicago can do this and we're well-prepared. Anybody who's saying you should abandon ... is not familiar with what is taking place."

His company's website, HillardHeintze.com, on Tuesday added two links that allow businesses and residents to register for updates. Businesses will be able to get alerts via text messages, emails, Twitter or through the security company's website, while residents will be referred to NotifyChicago, the city's information service.

The advisories will include such information as street closures as they are planned and locations of demonstrations, he said.

"We want to keep you advised of information that could be relevant to your operation," he said. "And in the event we have information that is specific to your business, we'll be making sure we reach out to you."

Businesses also can call 312-742-1699 with questions. Further details on security perimeters and transit changes will be shared closer to the summit, Heintze said.

To encourage Chicagoans and visitors to patronize restaurants in the days ahead, the restaurant association is hosting "Chicago's Culinary Crossroads," a dining program in which more than 200 restaurants will present tasting menus with dishes, desserts, wines and cocktails inspired by the NATO nations. The program started Tuesday and runs through May 25.

Seven internationally known chefs will pair up with chefs at local restaurants to prepare special menus.

Billy Lawless, owner of Henri and The Gage on Michigan Avenue, is among the restaurateurs participating in the chef pairings. And he expressed optimism about the summit's impact on his businesses.

"In the last couple of weeks, I've noticed a huge influx of foreign travelers, especially with all the attention Chicago is getting through all this media," he said. "We're open for business, we're excited about the event."

Other restaurants participating in the chef pairings include Piccolo Sogno, Keefer's, the Signature Room at the 95th, Bistronomic, Phil Stefani's 437 Rush and Rhapsody.

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