



## PROFILES OF SURVIVAL

### ROXANA TOFAN

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## IN THE WORLD OF COVID-19

**CAN YOU BELIEVE IT** has already been a year of this pandemic? When was the last time you went out for lunch or dinner with a bunch of your friends? Are you cooking more at home or ordering takeout? Restaurants have served communities as a source of entertainment, recreation, and dining for a long time and were some of the first businesses severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While some restaurant operators closed their doors, others have pivoted from a focus on onsite dining to a takeout and delivery model. And there is lingering uncertainty of whether and when consumers will start revisiting their local restaurants and which ones will survive this crisis.



Joseph Sutton is the General Manager of Spechts, twenty miles north of downtown San Antonio. Spechts Texas was founded in 1890 and it is my favorite place to enjoy good times, great food and live music.

### Roxana: Tell me about your how and when you came to this job.

**Joseph:** I have been in the restaurant industry my entire life. The last place I worked – where I had been for only 3 months - closed all its restaurants because COVID was coming hard. I had worked here at Spechts 20 years ago with my best friend when I was in high school for a couple summers. Luckily, at that time, Spechts was looking for a General Manager and I interviewed with them and the owners loved my history and experience. I ended up being the new General Manager chosen out of 200 applicants, which is pretty cool given my history with the place from 20 years ago. It's good to be back home even though our home lives have been turned upside down with this pandemic.

### Roxana: What is Spechts?

**Joseph:** Spechts Country Store is the best place for scratch cooking, live music and great drinks. It is one of those hidden gems, off the beaten pad, on the north side of San

Antonio. We have both indoor and outdoor seating with a stage for music outside. We're open Thursday through Sunday and have been around for 100 years. Spechts Store was built by Fridolin Hanz in 1887 and was used as a vaudeville house in the 1890s. A saloon and dancehall were added in 1908 when William Specht bought the property and renamed it. The micro-ballroom has since been restored and now hosts events and is called The Gin. Today, Spechts is owned by Scott and Maria Gruendler who recently registered Spechts Texas as a national historic site.

### Roxana: How has the restaurant adapted and survived during COVID?

**Joseph:** Spechts has the product, the great food and the right atmosphere. I was able to take it on during the pandemic and overcome these tough times for the business. Morale was so very important for our team members. Our jobs became hardest with having to disinfect and sanitize, unbolt tables for six feet social distancing and get employees' temperature tested when they come in. All of our touch points are disinfected every two hours. Our staff wear masks at all times. Besides all that, how we stayed going strong is having a genuine welcoming demeanor from our staff and we guide our guests through a good experience. I challenge our people to make sure that if they are not helping our guests, they are helping someone that is helping them. They are the tour guides for our customers. Our outdoor seating is a plus for us for the social distancing.

### Roxana: How has the volume of orders been doing COVID?

**Joseph:** Our customers have been good to us. We have opened up takeout, Uber Eats, Grub Hub and Toast Tab which has helped with getting orders to customer's homes but also being visible to other customers that maybe otherwise have not tried us before. Take-out has been doing much better since we opened

online orders. Truth is though, when the weather is nice and there is live music playing people want to be back outside, so we have live music Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and sometimes karaoke on Thursdays. We try to stay as creative and safe as possible. We want to keep our employees safe and working and our customers safe and happy.



### Roxana: Have your guests complied with COVID regulations?

**Joseph:** Any issues we've had have been minimum. We make sure our staff wear a mask and the customers know as soon as they walk into the door that they have to put the mask on. We have our signs posted everywhere. The best thing we can do is make sure the mandates are posted and we are visible and available to help them. We remind them the rules are important to keep everyone safe and to stay open.

### Roxana: What challenges do you see ahead?

**Joseph:** We are getting staffed up for catering events and more business for the spring and summer. There are some people that will not take a job because they will lose their government benefits. We need people who are flexible being part time since we are only open four days a week.

Spechts is one of those places that makes you feel more relaxed just by walking through the doors. It's got a rich history, a great story, and a dedicated team focused to keep customers happy. The building alone makes this place a destination worth seeking out, even without the cold beer and live music.

I challenge you to find ways during this pandemic to support the local businesses in whatever way you can. It is during these times we will continue to give and find the best in people. ■

