

## **Entry 2 - South Granville Business Improvement Association**

TGIFood Trucks

Special Events

June 1, 2021 - Sept 5, 2021

TGIFood Trucks was a summer pop-up of rotating food trucks to transform an underutilized park into a community gathering space. Open to the public and free of charge, TGIFood trucks provided a place to safely meet friends, get a delicious bite of food and increased the area's reputation for being fun and a foodie haven.

The City of Vancouver's Broadway Plan identified that the South Granville (SGBIA) is under served by park space and places for people to gather but a 26,000 sq ft park owned by the Vancouver School Board (VSB) was used by the occasional homeless groups to sleep, or the odd person enjoying their office lunch. The SGBIA wanted to activate this underutilized park but due to uncertainty and discomfort about social gathering, the VSB did not support gathering. Food security was an issue too. People were no longer visiting retail streets or working in the business districts so food truck operators struggled for customers. Residents have always long lamented the lack of a true grocery store to serve this community of mostly seniors, young women and young families but it was amplified by the pandemic. The pandemic was hitting our most vulnerable, women, low income and people of colour. Transit ridership was down to 25% according to Translink. People felt unsafe traveling by transit due to proximity to unvaccinated and unmasked riders. Shopping was being done online or within walking distance for those without vehicles. The only place to buy limited staples and groceries was from one pharmacy with supply chain issues. Residents were also feeling socially disconnected, isolated and depressed. The TGIFood Trucks served as an opportunity to address all those issues at once. The pod served as an economic development driver to draw back residents who no longer spent time in their own neighbourhood, to encourage sales and foot traffic, and to improve the brand of the area in terms of excitement and a dining destination.

The objective of TGIFood Trucks was to take advantage of the current crisis and leverage addressing those problems to improve our brand. The SGBIA saw an opportunity to rebuild the relationship with our residents by being the answer to their pandemic needs especially in light of where other options were limited by Public Health Orders. Our hopes were that by bringing residents and foodies back for the pod, that they would stick around and make a day of it. The pod was branded in a fun, cheeky way, with the charm of all the food truck vendors cooking all that food with love. This human approach was giving our brand a softer, authentic touch by association and slowly eroding our reputation as being unapproachable, sterile and boring. 98% of visitors surveyed left with a more positive impression of South Granville after visiting the pod and 74% went on to spend money afterward. TGIFood Trucks was part of a comprehensive seasonal campaign to invite people back to the neighbourhood. South Granville Summer promoted a 'summer in the city' using economic development, marketing and placemaking strategies to encourage people back into the neighbourhood for shopping, dining and socializing with a New Street Food Truck Pod, Free Outdoor Yoga, Free Curbside Concerts, New Outdoor Patios, New Public Space programming, Influencer marketing program, New Outdoor Craft Market event (first event in 16 years in this neighbourhood), new take-out incentive program, New COVID Recovery/liquor permitted plazas, new street banners, Foodie Tours, and self guided mural art tours/street party.

The Small Business BC Economic Development tool, Bizmap had identified that South Granville residents are a very desired and influential demographic; women in their early 30s, affluent, high income, and university educated, but they were choosing to spend their income in other neighbourhoods such as Kitsilano, or Main Street. They enjoyed the safety of living here but considered the area boring, unhip, and too expensive. As a result of the lockdown, for a very brief period of time, we had a captive audience with our residents because they couldn't go anywhere else to meet their basic (food, entertainment, community) and entertainment needs. We met those needs to rebuild a connection. Never waste a good pandemic. The SGBIA original intent was to reach

immediate residents within a 15 minute walk (1000 households) with a direct mail out and millennial foodies through foodie influencers on Instagram but the survey revealed TGIFood Trucks drew visitors all over Metro Vancouver as it was one of the first things to "wake up" during lockdown. A Toronto couple moved to this neighbourhood because TGIF gave them the impression this neighbourhood was a happening area. 33% had not been in the area in over a month. Our intercept survey revealed 69% of the visitors were between the age of 25- 44, 52% were residents, and 20% worked in the area and considered the pod a benefit for returning to office work.

The licensing and permitting process was already in place by the City. The Vancouver Food Truck Society was already organized and keen to get back to feeding people. The hardest challenge was getting permission to use the park space due to VSBs aversion to risk. In the end when the program was up and running, we heard no complaints, and the VSB even helped out by giving us access to their dumpster to more easily remove the garbage produced from the pod. Food trucks receive their licensing through the City of Vancouver and have already been vetted for health and safety. Part of the licensing includes a plan to use recyclable containers and a sanitation plan. We applied for the permit for curb space, and then a City employee connected us with all approved food truck license holders. After communicating our idea, we met with the Chair of the Vancouver Food Truck society to determine their needs, best hours, and a fair fee structure. To reach residents within a 15 min walk, a postal code mail drop postcard was sent to each household within a 15 minute walk. Realizing people were spending more time on the cell phones all day long, we promoted heavily on digital stories, blogs, "things to do" calendar of events, Instagram and Facebook. Interns managed a social media influencer gift card program where we invited local high profile foodies to come check it out first - on us. The Food truck pod had it's own Instagram account promoting it's lineup, a marketing strategy including bringing down foodie influencers to try out the food and get the word out about this new park, and promoted posts on the most popular digital mediums as we knew people were at home reading the web, and crawling Facebook and Instagram. Supporting materials such as ground decals, A-board signs, posters, etc were also produced to help catch walk by traffic and cyclists. The food truck pod budget of \$13,000 was funded initially by the South Granville BIA from our public space budget, but most of the costs of implementing the program were recovered by collecting vendor fees and only cost the BIA \$1,000. We had 6 vendor spots and charged \$30 to be there each day. TGIF operations were managed by two summer interns who's salaries were provided by the Federally funded Canadian Summer Jobs Grant.

TGIFood Trucks brought vibrancy to an underutilized public space and a sense of community during uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provided a more affordable and novel food supply which helped ease some of the food security and diet boredom. All of these resulted in improving brand loyalty from our core audience to South Granville and improved sales during a very challenging sales period. It exceeded our expectations as this once rarely used park space was filled with blankets. During operating hours (Fridays and Saturdays only) we saw groups of a dozen parents circling a pit of crawling babies, reconnecting senior friends in impromptu picnic chairs, pinterest-worthy fashionistas to goth couples and everything in between. I could not have been more surprised at the mix of people who came outside of our intended audience. Our pedestrian counters indicated foot traffic increased by 120%. 33% of those surveyed had not been in the area for over a month, many "in ages". TGIFood trucks resulted in new shoppers exploring the neighbourhood after they ate. 74% of visitors spent \$20-500 pp in the district during their visit. It drew residents by way of affordable and diverse cuisine and a chance to see friends. 52% of TGIF users were residents. 20% TGIF visitors worked in the area and reported they appreciated the outdoor amenity and it was a reason for returning to the office. This was a cost neutral program as the vendor fees recovered expenses. We surveyed the brick and mortar restaurants before and after to confirm their support. This is a very replicable vibrancy improvement program. Any district association with a local food truck community could book curb space, and invite food trucks into their area. The key is being very good with your budgeting to ensure you have enough to cover the sanitation and marketing requirements and also ensuring you have critical mass so it is enough of an attraction. No other Vancouver BIA has done it yet, but in most cases it's because the food trucks can park in any parking spot in the city so serve the busiest BIAs regardless. South Granville has not been an area that is typically served by food trucks so this would be best for associations like ours. TGIFood Trucks provided employment for inexperienced, low income women of colour as the face of the operations at the SGBIA office. We hired two interns through the Canadian Summer Jobs Grant. Almost all of the food trucks were

operated by BIPOC serving diverse ethnic food. This partnership with the Vancouver Food Truck Society was an opportunity for us to bring those people into our community and help them recover from the crisis. The city helped with securing the permits and reaching out to the food trucks and was happy to be a part of solving the food security concerns heard during the pandemic by it's taxpayers. TGIF will be expanding to 3 days per week in the summer in 2022, with full cost recovery.

TGIFood Trucks was a summer pop-up of rotating food trucks by the South Granville BIA to transform an underutilized park into a community gathering space. Open to the public and free of charge, TGIFood trucks provided a place to safely meet friends, get a delicious bite of food and increased the area's reputation for being fun and a foodie haven. The pod served as an economic development driver to draw back residents who no longer spent time in their own neighbourhood, to encourage sales and foot traffic, and to improve the brand of the area in terms of excitement and a dining destination. TGIFood Trucks was branded in a fun, cheeky way dovetailed with the charm of all the food truck vendors cooking all that food with love. This human approach gave South Granville's brand a softer, authentic touch by association 98% of visitors surveyed left with a more positive impression of South Granville after visiting the pod and 74% went on to spend money afterward.