

Ready to roll

Chef Matt Maroni hopes to put meals on wheels this summer

By Erin Breton
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Chef Matt Maroni outside his soon-to-open Edgewater eatery

When chef Matt Maroni read about New York's and LA's growing gourmet food truck industries, he was convinced the concept would be a great fit for Chicago.

Chicago, however, wasn't quite sure.

Current city regulations require food to be prepared and packaged before it's loaded on trucks, which means mobile chefs can't prepare meals on the spot. So Maroni and other food truck proponents--a group that includes **Lockwood** executive chef Phillip Foss and Troy Johnson of Chicago All Fired Up, among others--are urging the city council to rethink the policy.

In the meantime, Maroni will serve naan sandwiches and other street-appropriate fare out of a small Edgewater eatery called **Gastro-Wagon**, which is slated to open June 8. About a week after the stationary shop launches, he'll start selling pre-packaged versions of his naan-wiches and other eats from a converted postal truck.

He's currently stoking the fire on Twitter ([@chicagofoodtrux](#)) and [chicagofoodtrucks.com](#), a site he and his wife built in a single day on their kitchen table.

We asked Maroni about the burgeoning movement and what the summer might hold for food trucks in Chicago.

The movement really has taken off in the last couple of months. How did you kickstart it?

I authored a model ordinance and pitched it to Scott Waguespack (32nd Ward), my alderman, as job creation and entrepreneurship. [We'd be] creating a whole new industry in Chicago.

What kind of changes need to happen to put real food trucks on Chicago streets?

We need to make sure there are guidelines and that people aren't throwing trash on the ground. You'll have to go through the proper channels to get a [food truck] permit; safe handling practices need to be used.

[But] if I could heat food properly, it'd be even fresher, prepared the moment you

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on-the-go gourmet

Flirty Cupcakes on Wheels

Owned by: Tiffany Kurtz and husband Chris Sewall
Vehicle: Converted van
Menu: Red Velvet, banana-chocolate and other cupcakes
Location information: Flirty Cupcakes on Facebook; @FlirtyCupcakes on Twitter.

Chicago All Fired Up

Owned by: Troy Johnson
Vehicle: Formerly used to haul fire department compressors
Menu: Fried chicken, fish (Johnson has a Park District license and can cook in his truck)
Location information: South parking lot at 63rd Street Beach (6300 S. Lake Shore Drive)

Happy Bodega

Owned by: Amanda Cavazos
Vehicle: Ice cream truck
Menu: Gelato, baguette sandwiches, periodicals and fresh flowers.
Location information: Happy Bodega on Facebook; @HappyBodega on Twitter when it opens in late July/early August.

--E.B.



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What's the status?

On June 9, the proposal will be split out into [council] committees. This touches a lot of city departments because it is a mobile business and includes fees and taxes and stuff.

Nobody has said no. That's a great start. It could be two months [until it's decided]. It could be a year. I'm in it for the long haul.

Red tape aside, why do you think this is an ideal market for food trucks?

It's a great food town. The Chicago dog started on State Street in the 1900s--the street corner was where you went [to eat]. It's time to get back to that. That's how

some of the great food evolutions in Chicago have been built.

Erin Brereton is a Metromix special contributor. metromix@tribune.com

The Chicago Tribune's Monica Eng has more on Maroni's efforts and [the latest push for food trucks in Chicago](#).



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