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Airport adding two new concepts, culinary incubator to concession lineup

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The Indianapolis Airport Authority plans to partner with a Carmel-based concessionaire over 10 years to establish a culinary incubator in the airport.

The authority's board of directors on Friday unanimously approved the contract with CC Holdings Inc. that also calls for the company to invest $2.4 million to develop two new dining spaces in Concourse A and redesign the Shapiro's Delicatessen space in Concourse B.

The incubator, which will be led by local chef Steve Oakley and located in the publicly-accessible Civic Plaza, is meant to provide rising culinary talent with mentorship, visibility and support to hone their work, according to a news release the

authority issued Friday morning. Oakley is an award-winning chef who grew up in Indiana.

“This opportunity provides public value to the community by giving local rising culinary talent a massive stage,” Mario Rodriguez, executive director of the Indianapolis Airport Authority, said in written remarks. “More than 10.6 million people move through IND each year, and that kind of visibility can be a game-changer for a new chef or restaurant striving to break into the market.”

The decision to partner with CC Holdings followed an extensive request-for-proposals process consisting of 21 submissions and 17 total interviews. In addition to the four spaces now contracted with CC Holdings, the authority is evaluating two additional locations that could be used for new concepts in the future.

The two Concourse A concepts are Lift Off, which will feature Speedway-based Daredevil Brewing Co. drafts, and Java House Bistro, which got its start in Carmel. Both are expected to open by the end of this year. The incubator will open by autumn 2027, while the redesigned Shapiro’s will reopen in late 2027 after closing earlier in the year for the overhaul.

“Our goal at CC Holdings is to be a catalyst for growth for these locally owned and operated firms,” CC Holdings founder and CEO Kim Hendren said in a statement. “By exposing travelers to the incredible innovations in Indiana’s own backyard, offering exceptional interactions with our guests, and maximizing returns for all involved, we intend to enhance the Indiana experience for travelers with their every visit and further distinguish the airport as a uniquely superior destination.”

The contract will formally commence in January 2028, with each of the spaces expected to have a minimum annual rent guarantee that will escalate each year. In 2028, CC Holdings is expected to pay $125,000 for Shapiro's; $50,000 each for Lift Off and Java House; and $25,000 for the concession development space.

Each will also have a common use fee of 3% of gross sales, with Shapiro's and Java House paying an additional 11% of their gross sales and Lift Off paying 12% of its gross sales in rent. The incubator will pay the authority 6% of its gross sales, but CC Holdings is expected to receive a $500,000 rental credit to cover the build-out and remodel of that space.

According to revenue forecasts from CC Holdings that were provided to the board, each of the locations is expected to exceed $10 million in sales over a 10-year period. The total estimated revenue for the authority during that time is $6.66 million.

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