

# YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

Atlanta restaurants stand up with a sticker

BY PAUL CALVERT



Ticonderoga Club in Atlanta;  
OPPOSITE: The sticker says it all.

I OPERATE A RESTAURANT CALLED Ticonderoga Club in Atlanta's Krog Street Market with my business partner Greg Best. My fiancée, Sarah O'Brien, runs The Little Tart Bake Shop, also in the market. As owners, we are acutely aware of the power of posting a sign in your window. Hanging a sign that proposes restrictions beyond whether you are open or closed has a cruel and

racist history, particularly in the South. After the November 2016 election, we began to see a version of that old prejudice and injustice raise its head as shamelessly and as publicly as one might hang a window sign. We wanted to counter the inflamed desire to separate people. We decided to make a sign to tell the public where we stand.

Initially, it was Sarah's idea. I thought

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of something similar after seeing a handmade sign in the window of one of Atlanta's modern lunch counters: Ria's Bluebird, a diner in Grant Park. Their handmade sign listed the many different types of people welcome at Ria's and ended with the cheeky phrase "bless this mess." Sarah, Greg, and I agreed that a sign reminiscent of the old AAA or Diner's Club window decals seemed the way to go. We wanted it to be clear, direct, and democratic in its embrace of all people. We wanted the sign to state that *you* are welcome, not that *all* are. The sign had to speak to whomever stopped to read it.

We looped in our two favorite Atlanta designers: Bart Sasso of Gentlemen and Alvin Diec of Office of Brothers. They delivered a clear and classic-looking decal, white letters on a bright green backing. The green was to remind folks of a traffic light that says go—that they are welcome to enter. We handed out the stickers to our friends in the Atlanta restaurant industry. The stickers are intentionally free. The only trade is that when we give someone a sticker, they promise to display it prominently. The stickers are not for refrigerators or laptops. This is a public announcement of service.

The response has been incredible. We gave away the first run of 500 stickers in less than a week. The second run was 1,000. We shipped piles of stickers to businesses in Charleston, Nashville, Denver, and Toronto. Friends have lined up to

Courtesy of Paul Calvert

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underwrite additional printings—our third run will be 2,000 stickers. While we went into this with no connection to a wider movement, we realize that other like-minded people are taking similar action all over the country, and we are proud to be a small part of a broader campaign.

At Ticonderoga Club, we are not just doing business. We are making a statement that the hospitality we offer is available for all people, no questions asked. To post a sticker in your window is a simple act. Folks in America and all over the world endure and risk much more in order to pursue a life of joy and accomplishment. However, we know how powerful it can be to hang a sign, plainly state your purpose, and set a traveler's mind at ease. A hot cup of coffee. A warm plate of food. A cold beer. A place where you are welcome. ☺