REPORT SMALL BUSINESS

# Vendors seek relief from city fines

Bodega owners also feel the sting of fees for small infractions

BY TRIPP WHETSELL

Forincr plumber Joc Glaser startcd La Bella Torte, a dessert truck specializing in Italian pastries, with his AnnNlarie, in after both lost Between street prevate catering jobs and selling o's currently has annual rcvcnuc of nearly $100,000,

But the business isn't profitable, "It's a constant struggle to stay in business," said Mr. Glaser. He racks up weekly to 5500

in a let him operatc fronl a pernnancnt location because of a decades-old law that Ii nits the nunlber ofnew vcndor permits issued by rhc city each year.

The Street Vendor Project, a nonprofit, is trying to bclp initiatc a measure with the City Council to lift the cap, Meanwhilc, Mr. Glascr relies on a special-events permit that Icts operate At street Fairs and do outdoor catering

Mr. Glaser was optitnistic that fincs ',vould go down allcr Bill de Blasio was elected mayor because of his cmnpnigll pronlise to rcduce then-I, but he hasn't been impresscd by the. results ro The mayo/$ initial budget last year Forecast that fine 'evenue would grow to $807,5 lilillion in 2014, just $5 million less than the Bloombe•g administration had projectcd. Fincs rosc 72% ing the Bloomberg years, to $799 Illillion in 2013.

"New York is the. toughest city jn the world for food vendors, and the way they trcat us hurts everybody's bottom line," Mr. Glaser said.

Waiting for acllon

He's not ;done in his view that the done enough to teducc 00 business. "Il his desk yet' leL's put it that said Sean Basinski, an attorney and fhrnur burrito vcndor who founded the Nlanhattanbased Street Vendor Vroject to inv pjOVC workers' rights. gone

n'tdonc enough tostop Mr. Basinski said, He points to a24% incrcasc in tickets from 2013 to 2014, based nn data from the New York City ()pctl Data websitc.

Paying for small infractions has Inade it hard for so•nc busincsscs to survive, vendors say. "A lot ofowners are stil\_l being squeezed out because ofthcsc fincs," said Mouhamad Ali, an Egyptian immigrant and 14-year street-curt veteran. He runs a shishkebab and hot-dog stand on West 41st Srrcct and Seventh Avcnuc that he shares with five other vendors.

Thc city's Department of Consunner Affailf docs not havc ovcrofparking tickets, a it working Othegs de administration to reduce tings for small businesses.

'We'vc completely refortncd the wayweassesS finc•$,"said Commissioner Julie Menin. mncs have dropped so far this year alone, and the DCA bas reduced the number ofcounts and violations, shc saidBut according to Zulay Mateo, cxccutivc ofthe Bodega Association ofthe United States, many bodega owners battle woes similar to th0%C strcct vendors She said signage issues and in iproper labeling wcrc two of the most common infractions cited.

'Fllteyfccilike aren't be. ing given enough opportunity to fix thc problem," like there isn't enough tion and that they're going to auto matieuliy lose Itioncy as soon as an inspector through the door." Menin thc DCA has made efforts to improve communication, For instance, ir now conducts inspections in thc native languages ofindividual business owners.

"This makcs cvcrytbing much mote transparent and clear," WIS. Menin said'l'hc DCA also posts all of its inspector checklists online so know they Inok tar, shc said, It has also dcvised a mapping to ensure that neighborhoods arc inspccled equitable rates, she said.

Still, Manhattan Chincse fond vendor Doris Yao said these efforts may bc too little, roo late.

don't think Mayor dc BlasiQ is taking care ofsrnall businesses at all )ikc hc promised to," shc said. "I'm

JOE GLASER'S (lesser( truck gets ticketed up to $500 in parking violations each week.

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very worried. That's I'l)inkIng about doing scnrwvhing else." •

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