A new Korean-style bar with playful colors and flavors that evoke Seoul’s nightlife is open in River North. **Miki’s Park** debuted Thursday, three days before Governor J.B. Pritzker ordered all restaurants and bars in the state to **close dine-in service for at least two weeks**. Fortuitously, ownership had already installed a **walk-up window** where customers can now carry out “K-popcorn chicken,” dumplings, and more. During the shutdown, customers can pick up from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Ownership is also offering a 40-percent discount to hospitality industry workers.

Inspired by his Korean mother, whose maiden name is Miki Park, owner Shay Ghazimoradi said he saw a void for Korean cuisine in the area that he wanted to fill with his old-school-meets-new-school
approach. The menus for lunch and dinner feature a selection of smaller street food-style dishes as well as larger portions designed for sharing, including “Seoul Sliders” (two beef patties, gochujang, cucumber, soft dinner roll-style bun) and “Miki’s Bap” (vegetable fried rice, bulgogi, kimchi cucumbers, pickled cabbage, 60-degree egg, gochujan). Staff are also offering “yug mugs,” cups of traditional, hangover-busting Kimchi soup, through the carryout window.

When the bar is open and drinks are flowing, soju is the main attraction: “We want to educate and introduce Korean flavors and a different take on cocktails with soju as the main ingredient,” Ghazimoradi said, noting that Jinro soju is the top selling branded spirit in the world. “That’s mind-blowing to me — in Chicago, unless you go to traditional Korean restaurants, you won’t find soju anywhere.”

The drink menu is based on the type of beverages served in Seoul, according to general manager Orville Diaz. Staff then added the twist of a soju focus to create cocktails like a tropical “Jeju,” named for a South Korean island, and “Gold Panda No. 27,” a “silky, bright” take on a whiskey sour. “Sometimes drinks these days get a little complicated so these are just fun and approachable,” Diaz said.

The roughly 1,500 square-foot shotgun-style space opens with a “dramatic” bamboo archway, Ghazimoradi said. Faux cherry blossoms hang overhead and plants dot the floorspace. At night, colorful LED lighting and neon signs are meant to evoke the animated nightclubs and streets of Seoul. The team still wanted to maintain a connection to Chicago. “The piece that we really love is the bar,” Ghazimoradi said. “It’s a wonderful Art Deco bar that is the Chicago piece for us — the bar we kind of grew up sitting at, a bar we want everyone to sit at.”

The space features banquettes along the walls. Miki’s Park [Official Photo]

Ghazimoradi plans to let customers affix “love locks,” or heart-shaped metal padlocks, to a metal grid staircase inside the space. He’s selling the locks to raise funds for Holt International, a faith-based adoption agency. It’s another tribute to his mother, who was adopted, and a nod to South Korea’s famous N Seoul Tower, where tourists and locals have left thousands of locks.

The venue’s close proximity to late-night spots like Joy District and Celeste is by design — owners hope to capture hungry revelers with a simple food selection right along Hubbard Street. For now, Chicago’s thoroughfares are largely empty, as many try to socially distance or quarantine themselves and stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. In the meantime, Miki’s is putting its carryout window to work.

*Miki’s Park, 109 W. Hubbard Street, Open for carryout from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.*