



► REBECCA'S TAKE

## Mike Isabella is helping end the sad desk lunch

Office workers around the D.C. area will soon be able to get a taste of celebrity chef Mike Isabella's restaurants brought right to their doors — er, their desks.

The bento-style cold lunch boxes are now available for order thanks to a new partnership between Mike Isabella Concepts and Plum Relish, the local startup looking to vanquish the “sad desk lunch.”

The move represents a departure for Plum Relish, which was founded as Cozy Feast in 2015 with a business model that included making its own healthy boxed lunches in shared commercial kitchen space. The company also took on a school lunch account in partnership with another big-name chef, Cathal Armstrong of Restaurant Eve, eventually rebranding as Plum Relish and pursuing the office strategy.

“We spent 18 months learning the most optimal lunch: how people order, what they want to eat, how to deliver and present it,” said Sarah Van Dell, Plum Relish's founder.

The program will launch with boxes from Mike Isabella Concepts restaurants Kapnos in D.C. and Requin in Mosaic — a good fit, Van Dell said, because neither serves lunch. And though Isabella already runs his own catering company and could deliver his own service, Plum Relish's existing sales team, ordering system and delivery infrastructure make it much easier.

The bento boxes run about \$13.60 apiece, and though neither partner would provide specifics, both said the split allows each to turn a profit. The meals can also be set up buffet-style for a slightly higher cost. Plum Relish and MIC have been averaging more than 100 meals a day since soft-launching the program after Labor Day.

Van Dell anticipates adding more restaurants to the repertoire to increase variety.