

*Best in the
Business*

California Polytechnic State University *The Big Idea*

The Village Market at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo has been named the co-winner of the 2009 National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS) Best in the Business competition in The Big Idea category.

When the Poly Canyon Village Student Housing Complex and Marketplace was being designed, Thomas Welton, director of Campus Dining for Cal Poly Corporation, wanted something more than a standard convenience store. “I just wanted to offer something with more substance in respect to the original design. The original design was just a bank of freezers to have frozen food and cold beverages. It was bothering me and we decided to come up with something we felt would really offer something very unique that the students would appreciate. Particularly what we wanted to do was offer something other than just a regular c/store. That is when we came up with the concept for the different offerings that we have within the market.”

Knowing that the apartments in the complex would have kitchens in them, Welton and his team decided to offer items that would allow the students to cook – as well as tips to help them do it. “We added a whole raw food component to it – everything from salmon, scallops, chicken to beef, the seasonings to go with it and recipe cards.”

Along with adding items that allow students to cook in their own rooms, prepared meals are also part of the store. “We looked at the deli component of it and came up with a concept that we would offer everything from real ham to roasted turkey to meatloaf to salmon to New York steak and the components to go with it – everything from couscous to

Asian slaw to twice-baked potatoes,” he said. “The idea was what experience can we give our guests that is different in respects to the original layout?”

Also added to the original layout was a barbecue for the outside of the store. “We have everything from Yakitori to Thai barbecue to Korean barbecues as an example,” said Welton. “We wanted to offer multi-level options to choose from that represented quality and different than a normal c/store.”

Education is a big part of the store. “Anything we do culinarily, we want to be able to educate them on where they come from and, of course, the nutritional aspect of what we are serving,” he said. “That is why we looked at originally just doing the frozen dinner concept; it was important that we offered something different than that to add some nutritional value to it.”

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Best in the Business



“When you come visit the Village Market, you’ll notice that a lot of the foods there are really healthy, quick, easy meal ideas,” said Yukie Nishinaga, marketing and PR manager. “We wanted to educate the students too on how to make food. That is why the nutrition component came in where we could teach students, faculty and staff how to make easy recipes that are healthy by using different products in the market and giving them a learning experience.”

Many products in the store are purchased locally, with many of them grown on the Cal Poly campus. “A lot of it we produce here on campus,” said Welton. “Local was the idea when we decided to put that together. In particular, we look at the produce grown here on campus seasonally. We have a dairy here on campus; we use everything from dairy and cheese to excellent ice cream and chocolates. We looked at plants, flowers. We wanted to start with what we had on campus to partner with the university on that and to expand it further with local farmers in the area.”

Each month the store hosts a Farmer’s Market to motivate students and staff to buy the fresh local offerings.

Students have really taken to the store. “Student reaction has been overwhelming,” he said. “It has created its own vibe in there. The idea when we put it together was we thought of so many different questions that they would ask. We tried to



answer those before we opened – everything from sustainability to organics to fair trade to local to the food that we are offering and the variety that we have.”

Welton and his staff have continued to give students what they want by conducting surveys. “The great thing about that is we get immediate response,” he said. “We were striving for the organics line and we had less popular items in there. We get the surveys back and within a week’s period, we will add all of the things they want in respect to branded names. Response time was really important to me to make sure that we heard what they wanted in case we missed something and more importantly, we would be able to deliver it. I am pretty happy to say that we have done that.”

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