

Best in the Business

Bowling Green State University Foodservice Application

Commons Marketplace at Bowling Green State University in Ohio has been named the winner of the 2009 National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS) Best in the Business competition in the Foodservice Application category.

When Dining Services at the school determined that the time was right to replace Chily's Convenience Store, which had been in operation since the early 1980s, it decided it needed a fresh new look with a fresh new foodservice concept: Salads By Design.

"We had this little area in Commons Marketplace and we were talking about what we could do in there, and had a lot of requests for doing some kind of fresh concept," said Robin Bruning, foodservice coordinator II – Markets. "We knew we wanted to do something involving salad, but we wanted no eggs, no bacon, no croutons. We didn't want the things you could get on a standard residential dining salad bar. We wanted to have some kind of entertainment value to it."

Once they knew what they did – and didn't – want, they went to Marissa Sargent, sous chef in Dining Services' test kitchen, to come up with an idea.

"They gave me everything they didn't want and the ideas that they were thinking about, and I did some research on salad places I was



familiar with in another city," she said. "I went on the Internet and looked at various ideas that were out there and, based on the space that we had in that area, created something completely different with the flavors that work best together. That is how we started it."

She continued, "They gave me a few items they would like to see on there. There were six unusual items that they wanted to see. I took those six items and once I started building salads, I tried to cross-utilize some of those ingredients in some of those salads. We know that we wanted to let the customer at least choose something, so that is why we came up with the three different salad bases – the iceberg, the spinach/romaine blend and the romaine. They can choose the base of their salad, then they choose the topping on their salad, and if they wanted the option of adding one of the three meats that we came up with."

Sargent came up with five standard salads customers can choose from: Asian, Greek, Italian, Southwest and Orchard. Once the salad type and base are chosen, the combination is tossed right in front of the customer. "Tossing the salad right in front of the customers allows the freshest salad possible," she said. "This gives the customers interaction with the salad designer and provide a kind of entertainment while they wait."

For Bruning, it was important that the customers stick with the five standard salads. "We worked really hard with Marissa's help and myself with staff, when we first opened it, to keep steering the customers to trying the recipes and not treating it like it was a salad bar, that they get to pick and

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choose,” she said. “Once they tried the recipes and saw how all the ingredients were made to go together, the specific dressings were picked specifically for each recipe. We have very few people who really want to deviate from that. They really liked the whole concept and the way it is set up.”

When Salads By Design was first launched, Sara Meyer, marketing coordinator, started a promotional campaign. “We started with samplings, which went really well. They were for students and faculty and staff. A lot of times we have problems with faculty and staff not getting out of their work environment. They don’t know what is available to them on campus so we thought we would take what we have and take it to them in their buildings, their offices and let them try it for free. If they like it, we hope they would come to Commons to buy it.”

The samplings worked. “They were amazed,” she said. “Once we got it out there, it kind of sold itself.”

In conjunction with the samplings, a referral program was started. “If they came to the samplings, we gave them cards to pass out to friends, so it was a spin on word-of-mouth advertising and they could give it to other members who may not have been able to attend, or faculty or staff who are on other parts of campus,” Meyer said. “It was a great way to use them to get the word out as well.”

The promotions – as well as the tastes of the salads – have drawn customers to the location. “We have gotten really positive feedback from students, faculty and staff,” said Bruning. “Because of the salad concept, faculty and staff traffic has



increased by about 10 percent. That has been really nice. There are some people who have not been in the store for several years. They have really enjoyed it. They like the feel of it, they like the way it is set up.”

Bruning is very pleased with the way Salads By Design has worked. “Overall we worked really hard to get the concept to work within the store, really get something that the students were looking for and were going to be able to take advantage of on a regular basis. It wasn’t locking them in to just coming in and buying a slice of pizza or hot dog. They really can come in and get a nice choice several times during the week because a lot of them are in a hurry, and this may be their only option on this side of campus several times during the week. It is a healthy option. It is fresh; all of these ingredients that are in the salads are all things that are good for you.”

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