

GIVING CUSTOMERS A VOICE

Air Force Reserve Dining Facility Puts Comments to Work

Reservists training at the 155th Air Refueling Wing are encouraged to share their opinions and suggestions regarding any aspect of the dining facility from food to service, and those submissions are taken seriously.

“We have prided ourselves in the past of our 100 percent feedback policy. If a member puts their name on the comment card, it is our policy to contact 100 percent of those who submit comment cards by phone or e-mail,” explained Master Sgt. Aaron Aulner, prime ribs manager, 155th Air Refueling Wing.

Defeated in its first attempt to win the Disney Award, the dining facility implemented customer surveys in 2005 in an effort to improve performance with the goal of rais-

ing its evaluation score to win that competition.

That goal was reached in 2008 when the 155th dining facility became a Disney winner.

Comment cards on each table are the first way feedback is received. The cards utilize a standard questionnaire format that does not change; customers fill out the spaces and either can place the completed form in a box as they exit the facility or submit answers online.

Comment cards have spaces to fill in the date and time of the visit; identify if the meal was short order, main line or other; and ask for the name, grade, unit organization and duty phone.

In the middle, customers are asked to rate seven categories by checking off as excellent, satisfactory or unsatisfactory: food variety; food taste; temperature of food; employee appearance; cleanliness; courtesy of servers; and overall dining experience.

A comments section on the lower third of the card asks two questions: Is there anything we can do to improve your experience? and Are there any new items you would like us to serve?



“We average about 10 to 15 comment cards each day,” Aulner said.

Average customer traffic through the dining facility reaches between 400 and 425 when all personnel are home-stationed and falls to about 350 during deployments.

Meals are served twice a day; but as a reserve base, the dining facility is only open on Saturday and Sunday for unit training assembly. Cost per meal is set at \$4.25, which includes anything served as well as seconds. Customers sign in and the dining facility is reimbursed by the Guard.

COMMENT CARDS AT WORK

To further encourage feedback, a program called “Comment Cards at Work” identifies the individual who made the suggestion that is being used.

“If a suggestion by a customer is implemented, we place a little sign that says ‘Comment Cards at Work: thank you, ___’ to the individual who made the suggestion. We have a few customers who have been fierce participants in this program and have made several suggestions that have been implemented,” Aulner said. “People enjoy seeing recognition of their ideas.



FOOD ADVISORY BOARD

More customer feedback is collected through quarterly meetings of a Food Advisory Board.

The board comprises one representative from each of the 15 units at the base, but typically meets with about 12 members (based on mission requirements) who arrive 15 minutes before the dining facility doors open for the meal period. After receiving their food, the board sits together to discuss the meal and general foodservice issues. From time to time the board will review new menu items for suitability prior to implementation.

One of biggest benefits of the Food Board is that each unit has a Dining Facility advocate. If a Maintenance troop has a question about the dining facility, they can go to the unit's food board representative. The food board representative will answer the question or ask someone in the dining facility. "This has dispelled rumors, clarified misunderstandings, and led to good will in several areas on base," Aulner explained.

Food boards also are useful for brainstorming ideas in response to the many general suggestions customers make in the survey forms.

Brainstorming proved useful settling a contentious question about selecting an onion ring. After one vendor supplying the dining facility stopped carrying the brand of onion rings that was used, a customer survey came back with the drawing of an one with crunchy breading on the outside.

"We tasked the Food Board to select the replacement product," Aulner said.

The board selected a thick-cut breaded crumb onion ring supplied through Reinhart Foodservice over a pre-formed challenger. "That was the biggest area of contention," said Sgt. Casey Svitak, services technician, 155th Air Refueling Wing.

FEEDBACK IN ACTION

Suggestions received, whether from customers or through the food board, have led the dining facility to expand variety beyond simply a main line serving home-style entrées with a choice of two starches and two vegetables, plus a short-order line, typically serving hamburgers, fries and nachos.

Taco, pasta, sandwich, potato and other themed food bars add variety to the choices available in the dining facility by temporarily shutting down

The form is titled "FOOD SERVICE CUSTOMER SURVEY" and includes the following sections:

- DATE** and **TIME**
- UNIT NUMBER**, **POST LIFE**, **OTHER**, **UNIT IN SUPPORT**
- TYPE OF CUSTOMER** (OFFICER, SERGEANT, PRIVATE, SGT. MAJOR)
- UNIT OF ORIGIN** and **DUTY FROM**
- SURVEY DATA** table with columns: **ITEM**, **QUALITY**, **SATISFACTORY**, **UNSATISFACTORY**
- FOOD SERVING**
- FOOD PRICE**
- AVAILABILITY OF FOOD**
- AVAILABILITY OF SERVICE**
- COURTESY**
- COMMENTS** (PLEASE PRINT)
- DO YOU THINK THE FOOD WAS GOOD TO PLEASE YOUR APPETITE?**
- DO YOU THINK THE FOOD WAS GOOD TO PLEASE YOUR TASTE?**



the short-order line and continuing to give an alternative to the main line entrées.

"It's an extensive offering within the heading," said Aulner.

Grilled cheese is a popular addition being served regularly as a result of the customer survey.

Healthy options are also available every meal as a result of the survey. When one entrée is beef pot roast, the second option might be braised chicken breast, for example.

Brunch is an innovative addition to the dining facility schedule that was motivated by the Food Board and has received a good response from customers.

For brunch, dining facility operating hours are moved up an hour to 10 a.m. to noon compared with

the normal 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. meal period.

Aulner also collects customer feedback himself by taking every opportunity to get out and talk with customers about the food, what they like and dislike.

Comment cards and discussions with customers build relationships with the customers and make them feel important and that they are part of the process, he said. To identify and correct problems, Aulner added that he analyzes those comments, noting recipes that worked or didn't and impressions about whether cooking time was too long.

"That helps us to dramatically improve the quality of our food," he explained. "You've got to read into some of these."

—GFS