



Photo Credit: Karen DeVita/Centenary College

CENTENARY COLLEGE

Opens Recruiting Crown Jewel

Centenary College in Hackettstown, N.J., recently opened a new dining hall that has become a marketing tool for student recruitment.

The new dining hall at the David and Carol Lackland Center has been used by the university as a recruiting tool in radio commercials and on campus tours.

That was not the case with the facility it replaced. “We were in a building at the front of campus that was well over 100 years old and looked it,” said Linda Gonja, director of Dining Services with Chartwells, the campus foodservice provider. “The

kitchen was first built in the early 1900s. It did have an addition put on it, but the actual kitchen and cooking facilities were from back in the early 1900s. It was interesting. It was very, very old equipment — very pieced together, a piece that has been found here or brought in from there. We had refrigerators that were actually sinking. During the 12 years I was there, the walk-in refrigerators sank about two to two-and-a-half inches.”

The new dining facility’s style of service is based on Chartwells’ Pulse on Dining (POD) program. It uses a generational approach to cater to the needs of today’s college students. POD involves active participation and interaction from the students and staff, which delivers a complete and satisfying experience during meal time. It is 100 percent responsive and accommodating to the needs of the current generation of college students, according to the company.

“We knew from the beginning that we wanted Pulse on Dining,” she said. “It targets fresh, made in front of the customer. We have to meet certain criteria to be called a Pulse on Dining account. We took some road trips and visited some Pulse on Dining schools and knew from the start that that was the way we were going.”

One of the stations in the new dining facility is The Kitchen. “We are not talking about the back of the house,” said Gonja. “The Kitchen is a suite that has grills and fryers, flat tops and a serving area, so every lunch and dinner we have one or two chefs producing part of the menu. We can’t produce the whole menu out there. We have woks there for sautéing. We have the grill or the broiler. There is a lot of in-time cooking.”

The Kitchen also features a number of international choices. “Every month, the company has different marketing initiatives called Your Region, Your World,” she said. “This month, the region was New York City street food. During the month, we had zeppoles with





cinnamon and sugar. One day at MyPantry we had pretzels with mustard. We did pastrami at the Deli Line. We have arroz con pollo coming up tomorrow. Your World this month was the food of Austria. We did a pork schnitzel with red cabbage, mashed potatoes and applesauce.”

With its customized cooking, The Kitchen is also an area where students with special dietary needs, like allergies, can get their food. “It makes it great for when the students have a special diet or special need,” said Gonia. “We have a young lady who has a soy allergy. She can walk up to the kitchen and order from any of the chefs — they are very well versed in what has soy. She has gotten to know them. Each student with a special diet is encouraged to know all of the chefs.”

She continued, “She will say, ‘What’s safe for me?’ They say this is good for you or take this pasta and just sauté it over here for you. They can adapt stuff already being served to the other students to meet her needs or a gluten-free need.”

The Kitchen features a gluten-free area also. “Say we have a chicken that has a sauce on it, but a particular student doesn’t want the sauce, they can get it that way,” said Gonia.

The MyPantry area resembles a homestyle kitchen. “It has a homestyle double-door refrigerator, and we keep soy milk and little pudding cups,” she said. “The freezer is filled with ice cream novelties.”

A number of specials are run in that area. “We have a person who stands there, and every day it is a different dish every lunch and every dinner,” said Gonia. “The other night it was root beer floats he was making. It might be a carved corned beef. Yesterday was potstickers with fried rice and fortune cookies. He is communicating with the guests.”

The station features a counter with six barstools. “We have

a group of students who sit there every lunch and every dinner,” she said. “They enjoy talking with him. You see a lot of the same kids there every day. It is great that they have found a place that they are comfortable to be in at the dining hall.”

In addition, the station features cereal and bagels that students can help themselves to, and the toaster is right there. “They walk back and help themselves,” said Gonia. “They are in and out of the refrigerator. It is there for them.”

A pizza and pasta station, featuring a Wood Stone oven, is extremely popular. “We have a man, Jamie, who was a cook here for a year and a half, but prior to that he owned a pizza parlor for 18 years,” she said. “He jumped at the chance to run the pizza. Here we have a man doing what he loves and it really shows. The kids are saying that our pizza is the best pizza in town.”

The dining hall also features a deli area, grill and salad bar. “We have the salad bar in the center of the room that has 36 items — 75 percent we try to do as fresh items,” said Gonia.

“The other may be a bean or something like that. We have three homemade soups every day at the soup station.”

In addition to the residential dining stations, there is a small retail aspect to the facility called Outtakes. “We carry a few salads and sandwiches,” she said. “If the students miss dinner, they can choose to use their dinner meal swipe there. We also have a late-night aspect with a traditional snack bar food menu. They can choose to transfer their meal to late-night or buy stuff at Outtakes.”

The school’s baker also provides some items for Outtakes. “We have a great baker,” said Gonia. “There are some on the staff who call her the evil baker because her products convince them to eat a lot of baked goods.”

Gonia is already working on improvements for the dining hall for next semester.

“I was up in Rhinebeck in New York and went to a bakery called Bread Alone with a variety of artisan breads and said, ‘We can do this,’” she said. “We are going to set up our own program. We are going to do some organic breads, some of which will come out of the Wood Stone oven. In the back kitchen, we have a combitherm oven. The steam just lends a great crust to bread. We are going to be using some organic and other flours. We are going to go on a road trip in June and check out some bread places, and we have been buying books. We have contacted a supplier where we will be able to get our organic flours.”

Gonia was not surprised to find out that the school was using the dining hall as a marketing tool. “It really didn’t surprise me because when they take tours, they are always bringing them into the dining room, and I like to steal the tour away from the tour guide. They love when I take them over and explain about the dining. Most of our events have been held in this building because it just fits everybody so well. Parents enjoy coming in here and seeing the new building.”

The dining hall is not just attracting new students. “We are actually getting some local people in town coming in for meals too because they have found out about it by word of mouth,” she noted.

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