

# NC State Finds Success with Wolfpack-to-Go

North Carolina State University (NC State) in Raleigh recently launched its own branded line of freshly made grab 'n go items.

"In looking at our operations, we felt that we had a real opportunity to push a line of freshly made sandwiches, pitas and salads and push those to the non-traditional food outlets," said Randy Lait, director of Dining Services. "We started with our coffee shops where we had some sandwiches and salads, but we needed to develop a special line that fit directly in with the pricepoint that we were looking for, and to introduce a new line of options for food to sell through our coffee shops."

Wolfpack-to-Go, which is named after the school's nickname, features 52 varieties of sandwiches, salads, wraps, pitas and yogurt parfaits made daily on campus and deployed to campus restaurants carrying the brand. The line was launched in May.

"We have gotten off to a really good start with it," he said. "These items are freshly made on campus in a central kitchen. We partnered with a local bakery to get fresh pitas and breads. Our staff puts these together and they run out on the same truck that delivered the bakery items to those coffee shops."

Prior to launching the Wolfpack-to-Go line, fresh-made sandwiches were purchased from a local café. "By the time we bought them from them and tried to mark them up a little, and then sell them through the convenience store, they were pretty expensive," said Lait. "We were teetering on the edge of not having the value customers expect for the price they pay. It is our thinking that if we can develop this line into the convenience stores, then if we hit a point where we think we can deliver a significant amount of these products to the stores to justify a dedicated truck and driver to make that happen, that will be our next move. We really need to have fresh food in our convenience stores. What better way than to do that ourselves and push that out fresh each morning."

The items in the line, including chicken salad pitas, a spicy Southwest Snakebite pita, an Asian salad, yogurt parfaits and ham, turkey and roast beef sandwiches were extensively tested before the launch. "The lineup was developed and tested by University Dining," said Kitty Lewis, retail branding manager. "We worked hard to create a wide array of taste profiles and price points that have broad appeal."

One of the main reasons for the early success is that it fits in with the school's meal equivalency program. "That has really helped it to take off," said Lait. "The first \$5.50 of what is on



your tray counts as one of your dining hall meals. It is a very popular program. It fits very nicely so you can get the pita, a drink and a bag of chips, and it will fit just right within that limit. It puts some meal options in a great value in parts of the campus where we have established things like coffee shops and underserved parts of the campus. We don't have a lot of food outlets where the Park Shops coffee shop is; there isn't anything within a four-minute walk from there. Adding the unit to the coffee shop really made a new food outlet possible, and we sell quite a bit of food through there now."

He said he has seen a change in what items students are taking on the go in the years that he has been in university dining. "I think it is very big, and what is being grabbed and gone with is changing. It used to be a bag of chips and a candy bar. That is not the case any more in today's grab 'n go. It is fresh food that needs to be portable, but not at the expense of nutrition or freshness or be in some pre-packaged kind of thing. It has to be something that they can just get and keep moving with that meets today's standards."

Lait has a unique way of following the trends of today's NC State students – his daughter attends the school. "I watch her to see how she does things, what her friends do," he said. "They seem to be reluctant or it's challenging to schedule meals. Meals are the kind of thing that happen spontaneously. 'I'm hungry, you're hungry? Let's eat.' That kind of spontaneity leads to the need to be able to have quick and easy access to food, no matter if I have time to sit down and eat or we're going to go on to our next activity. I think that that drives a lot of that. It is very spontaneous now."

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