

## Cash or Board, Dine In or Take Out, DePaul Has it All in One New Facility

**DePaul University's new student center welcomes both cash and board-plan customers in a flexible new food-service operation.**

**D**ePaul University is certainly an institution, but the foodservice in its newly opened student center is no mess hall. What students eat, when they eat, and how they expect food to be served is changing dramatically and the university's dining service near downtown Chicago is designed to deliver what they want.

Opened in early January, foodservices are housed in the university's new \$25 million Lincoln Park Student Center. The campus serves 8,100 undergraduate and graduate students who mostly commute to the school in the upscale neighborhood.

DePaul's new dining is a dramatic improvement from what it offered in the past. The entire building is 155,000 sq. ft. and foodservice takes up 30,000 sq. ft. with a new kitchen four times as large as the old one. The university spent \$9.2 million on food-service operations in the building.

"How students approach food nowadays is much different than the



**Foodservices in DePaul University's new Lincoln Park Student Center took \$9.2 million of the total \$25 million budget to complete... and it shows.**

traditional approach," says Richard Bamburak, senior principal, COO, with WTW Architects in Pittsburgh. The firm collaborated on the project with Thomas Ricca Associates based in Colorado. "It's not the old three meals-a-day plan where you go stand in a cafeteria line for food. Students are pretty much demanding that their schools have all-day, restaurant-style food whenever they want it."

### **Tailored to Today's Customer**

The building's main foodservice, done in diner-style décor, is on the second floor and includes three separate "platforms," or stations that are

extremely flexible and can be reconfigured as needed because much of the equipment is on wheels. The platforms can simultaneously run cash and board-plan food sales thanks to a new POS system that processes cash payment and board-plan cards side by side.

"Five, 10 years from now, if we want to do something completely different, it will be much easier to rehab a platform than it would be to gut a traditional kitchen," says Kevin Keegan, DePaul's associate vice president of student and auxiliary services. Equipment in the stations includes nine fryers, three conveyor pizza ovens, two double ovens and

several walk-in coolers that accommodate transported carts of food from the central kitchen in the back. Food from these display "platforms," is served on disposables and accommodates both the cash and board crowd.

To produce the bulk of the board plan menu, a central kitchen with back-room operations holds two rotisseries, two soup kettles, a four-burner range, chargrill, flat-top grill, overhead broiler and conveyor oven. Custom-made counters, marble on top, wood below, feature built-in undercounter refrigerated drawers. The board plan menu is served on china. Cash customers are welcome to dine in on the back kitchen offerings as well.

Foodservice anticipates about 6,000 transactions daily. "The flexibility of going from a board plan to retail at a moment's notice is really very different than many other static cafeteria operations for colleges," says Bamburak.

"We have moved most of the production out of the back-of-the-house kitchen and placed it in front of the customer so the customer's senses will be bombarded with smell, sight and sound of food coming at them. They will know that their food is being prepared freshly and being prepared for them," says Rick Thomas, DePaul's director of student centers.

Menu selections, and showcasing preparation in front of students, is designed to directly compete with local outlets. The neighborhood houses trendy, upscale restaurants and grocery stores. DePaul offerings include rotisserie pork loin with ginger glaze, Thai chicken pizza, sesame glazed tuna steak, grilled mahi-mahi with cilantro lime sauce and Greek chicken.

To help design the new foodservice, the university researched and conducted focus groups to uncover

students' eating preferences. Students said they wanted the same healthy, innovative food in their cafeteria that they could get elsewhere, in addition to pizza, burgers and fries, and "comfort food." With plenty of chains available throughout the urban setting, they didn't want branding.

"We get away from institutional cooking and get more into restaurant-style, made-to-order cooking. The whole concept was designed to deliver restaurant-quality food in a university environment," says Leo Pecoraro, operations director for dining services for Chartwells, a division of the North Carolina-based Compass Group which runs DePaul's foodservice. "But it also was designed to accommodate the payment systems unique to an urban university, meaning board and cash."

### Additional Venues

The new facility also gives the university the chance to tap into banquet and catering opportunities for university events and outside

clients. The first floor holds a production and service kitchen for large events and a 400-seat ballroom. Several hundred people can be accommodated in third-floor conference rooms that break out to different sizes.

Then there's "Brownstone," a coffee and deli bar on the first floor, that sits in a high-traffic area of the building and is targeted at grab-and-go customers. It offers coffee, pastries, biscotti, light sandwiches and is also wired for Internet hook-ups.

Even after customers get their food, they still don't feel like they have to eat it in a cavernous cafeteria. The building has an atrium down the middle that can seat up to 700 customers from the main foodservice operation. A mix of upholstered and bare seats are arranged in different clusters for large and small groups.

Customer feedback says they are impressed with the variety of food choices and short wait times. Looks like high marks are not earned only in DePaul's classrooms.



The foodservices were designed on three flexible "platforms" with most equipment and serving stations actually set on wheels or made otherwise movable.