



# SERVING UP A PLATE OF HOSPITAL DINING DESIGN

JOHNSON CITY MEDICAL CENTER ANSWERS CALL FOR A BETTER HEALTHCARE FOOD SERVICE EXPERIENCE **By G. Stephen O'Connor**

## JOHNSON CITY MEDICAL CENTER, AN AFFILIATE OF MOUNTAIN STATES HEALTH ALLIANCE, WAS

in need of a fresh look and a complete upgrade of menu offerings. The Johnson City, Tenn., campus' population had increased in size, and national food service brands had recently developed within close proximity of the hospital, leaving the staff and visitors expecting expanded and enhanced food concepts within the hospital.

The decor and lighting was outdated; over the years the equipment, counters and fixtures had been supplemented in a haphazard manner. From the standpoint of decor, style of service and offerings the facility completely lacked any sense of cohesiveness. The equipment, counters and fixtures were no longer compliant with the National Sanitation Foundation or ADA code and much of the equipment was at the end of its useful life cycle.

The previous serving area was small, approximately 1,300 square feet, narrow and dimly lit. This condition created an inadequate atmosphere for merchandising and serving food to the burgeoning hospital population. The size of the serving area severely restricted the number of serving stations thereby limiting the quantity of menu selections. The ability to accommodate customer flow in an adequate manner was



**top:** The dining area now includes more than 200 seats that can be configured to meet the size of any small group.

inhibited by the placement of only two cashier's stations.

There were several integral challenges to this renovation. The overall footprint of the space including serving, dining and trash handling could not increase from the net square footage. The existing cooking exhaust system could not be relocated or altered in any way. Post-consumer trash would need to travel vertically to a

lower level in order to exit the building. This required needing an adequately-sized and discreetly-placed soiled tray drop and trash holding area.

To achieve the client's goals of having an inviting facility and offering a myriad of choices to allow for quick customer throughput, L2M Foodservice Design Group created an open and welcoming serving and dining area.

The new serving area increased in size to 3,100 square feet and the menu selections expanded to include a traditional grill, made to order deli sandwiches, display cooking station, traditional hot food, pizza/pasta, grab-and-go, and a centrally located soup and salad bar. Customer flow was maximized by incorporating a wider serving area and to allow customers to meander around the stations and have adequate space while making their food selections. Customer throughput was improved by the inclusion of the three double-sided cashier stands.

The dining room was reconfigured to include 200 seats, a great improvement from the previous amount of dining space. The seating style is flexible and allows adequate space for single diners as well as larger congregate groups that visit the cafeteria daily. The dining area also includes a soiled tray drop into a trash accumulation room. The previous tray/trash drop station consisted of open racks placed in the cafeteria exit corridor, a real eyesore.

The new design includes a trash accumulation room. This new room was sized to hold accumulated trash through a meal period so that trash would not be transported in public view. The drop window and trash room were screened by a wall finished with stacked stone. This had the dual benefit of screening the trash area and providing a handsome feature wall. The wall adjacent to the stacked stone was painted in a mural commissioned by the hospital to depict local Smoky Mountain scenery. The exterior view was maintained to allow for natural light and to provide a connection to the natural surroundings.

The overall gross square footage of the serving and dining area was not increased. L2M FSDG was able to rework the area and eliminate underutilized storage areas, relocate a physicians' dining room to an adjacent unused space and eliminate a redundant serving station.

The general lighting throughout the serving area was greatly enhanced by the use of compact recessed fluorescent fixtures. Mini-spot track lighting was installed to illuminate station signage. The dining room also included compact fluorescent fixtures but also included hanging lit fluorescent fixtures to wash the ceiling with light and provide plentiful general lighting while avoiding harsh down lighting.

The working environment for the staff of an acute care facility is demanding and stressful. It's important to create a soothing and relaxing dining space as an escape without having the environment becoming stale. Earth tone finishes were selected to provide just such an environment. Walls were finished in soft



The reconfigured serving areas feature an expanded menu, wider throughput and three cashier stations.

yellows, greens and tans, with accents of eggplant purple and cayenne red.

The counters are constructed of a sturdy stainless steel frame for the durability needed in this high-volume institutional setting. The countertops are surfaced in an engineered stone to provide durability and a natural stone-like appearance at a fraction of the cost. An added advantage to this material is ease of cleaning and inherent anti-microbial properties, an important quality in an institutional foodservice environment. Enhancing the earth tone theme, the counter fronts are a combination of various wood veneers with accents. These fronts are

designed to be removable, to allow access to the utilities concealed within, and to provide an opportunity for changing this aspect of the decor in the future.

The ceilings are a combination of hard bulkheads over the serving counters and acoustical tile elsewhere. The bulkheads serve the dual purpose of adding a sense of dimension to the space, providing an opportunity to add color and act as a backdrop for station signage. The bulkheads and acoustical ceiling tile on the operator side of the counters were finished with a smooth and cleanable material as required per health code.

The floor surface in the serving area is a combination of ceramic tiles. The tiles are layered out in a flowing pattern, and the colors echo the earth tone finish palette of the space. The dining room floor is finished with carpet tiles that help reduce the noise inherent to an open space while providing the ability to easily replace portions of the carpet as they are soiled and stained beyond cleaning.

The end result was the creation of a retail food-service dining space that is an important component in the nutritional health and relaxation of the hospital staff and visitors. ■



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