



International, Healthful Fare Highlight UMass Menus

Healthful options, complemented by new flavors, topped off by environmental awareness, are the three main ingredients of hot campus dining, according to Ken Toong, director of dining and retail foodservices for the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Dining Services.

UMass-Amherst Dining Services is one of the nation's largest college meal providers. Serving 13,000 students, this operation boasts annual revenues of \$50 million, of which \$35 million is generated through student dining. The balance comes through catering and retail outlets. Volume has grown annually at a rate of 5% to 10%, largely through retention of existing business as new students come in.

Offering students better quality, expanded choices, more global cuisine and longer hours helps to keep them coming back, says Toong, an award-winning trendsetter. His innovative programs have garnered, for the fifth time, the National Association of College & University Food Services (NACUFS) Loyal E. Horton Award in the Residence Hall Dining, Multiple Concepts/Outlets category.

Among cutting-edge events sponsored by UMass-Dining, for example, is a guest chef series that introduces students to cuisines of different cultures, such as that of Oaxaca, Mexico. These exhibitions feature a variety of entrees and appetizers, made with spices and ingredients not typical of American dishes. Through such approaches, Toong realizes his goal of introducing new, authentic flavors. "We need to leverage world cuisines, like Southeast Asian, Mediterranean, South American and other cultures. Food is a fashion."

Thanks to global campaigns, sushi has become a top seller and is served twice a week. Sushi now falls into the "comfort food" category, Toong comments. Made to order, the popular appetizer item—accompanied by wasabi, ginger and miso soup—is turned out by a staff bolstered by some 1,200 student trainees. Diners can take one roll at a time and come back for seconds.

In addition to creating menu excitement, UMass focuses on wellness. Small portions are stressed within an all-you-can-eat format. Introduction of more plant-based proteins is another key health-oriented strategy. "Do you need 4 to 5 ounces of meat all the time?" says Toong. "How about tofu, beans or peanuts?" With this philosophy in mind, an expanded assortment of salad entrees and wraps is available. Among items that have made a hit is a stuffed cabbage or lettuce roll made with pre-cut greens. Desserts are still another area in which UMass strives to incorporate healthful ingredients. What could be better, for instance, than a small portion of shortcake topped with fresh strawberries?

Throughout all, sustainability and local agriculture are key factors, Toong points out. For this reason, 20% of produce used, plus brown eggs, are sourced from local farmers.



Operators Seek Global Info

Foodservice operators want to know more about world cuisines, according to a survey by Technomic, Inc., the Chicago-based research and consulting firm.

Some 572 professionals from various industry segments participated in the Technomic iLab research. Fully 84% said they wanted information on other countries' menu fare. Topping the list of culinary interests, as indicated by 83% of respondents, was Mediterranean/Italian cuisine. Additionally, 74% of respondents said they would like to know more about Asian and Latin-American/Caribbean menu items.