

Menus make the grade

Stealth health, sustainability, variety drive campus foodservice changes ● BY FERN GLAZER

Chances are that many college students already are your patrons, and if they are not, they will be soon.

Whether you're a commercial restaurant operator, an on-site contractor, or you aspire to open nontraditional locations on college campuses, you need to know what's on the minds of the 18- to 25-year-old set.

For insight into the trends influencing foodservice sales at colleges and universities, we talked to foodservice directors around the country. Following are the biggest sales drivers as well as a few up-and-comers. Because as one college operator succinctly put it: "We've got to listen to what they're saying. [Then] we've got to address that."

Stealth health

Gone are the days of the "freshman 15" — when every freshman put on 15 pounds after spending a year of college consuming a steady diet of burgers, fries and pizza.



Today's college students are more conscious of the foods they eat and the impact they have on their health and well-being.

While they haven't given up classic fast foods, this generation

also is looking for more healthful options, including non-fried, transfat-free, low-calorie foods and those that address dietary needs and lifestyle choices, such as vegetarian, flexitarian and

TCNJ The College of New Jersey

The College of New Jersey renovated its main dining hall, changing from a traditional cafeteria to a trayless food court that features 10 destinations where students can order and watch their meals being prepared.

gluten-free options.

"Well-balanced choices — they want to know these choices [exist]. They want to be able to make these choices," said Rob Morasco, senior director of development, campus services for Sodexo.

Sodexo wants all its patrons to eat healthfully, but as Morasco said, "We can't dictate to the crowd. They're college students. [So we take a] stealth-health approach."

For Gaithersburg, Md.-based Sodexo, which provides foodservice to more than 650 campuses in the United States, the stealth approach means providing healthful options at every meal,

but not marketing them too aggressively. For example, while pizza with whole-wheat crust might be available, there is not necessarily going to be a label touting its healthful benefits.

"We don't want to say our whole-wheat pizza crust is all-natural," Morasco said. "It might turn them away from pizza because they're not eating it for health. You can't make wellness a program. I think it has to be a part of our DNA."

Fast and fresh

For students at The College of New Jersey, or TCNJ, in Ewing, N.J., eating healthfully means

eating fresh, prepared-in-front-of-you meals.

"We know based on feedback from students that they wanted fresh food prepared in front of them and destination dining," said Karen A. Roth, director of dining services. "The biggest thing they wanted was access to the fresher foods."

To meet students' desires, in 2008, TCNJ, along with dining partner Sodexo, embarked on a complete renovation of its main dining hall, transforming its traditional cafeteria into a trayless food court featuring destination "restaurants." Today, at the new

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