FOCUS ON

HEALTHCARE foodservice

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United We Stand

I was actually covering healthcare foodservice when the National Society for Healthcare Foodservice Management (HFM) was formed back in '88. It was a tough and polarizing time for professionals who spent years as members of the American Society for Healthcare Food Service Administrators (ASHFSA). When you consider that 100% of HFM members and more than 94% of ASHFSA members voted to reunite as the Association for Healthcare Foodservice (AHF), this new era will be the polar opposite of that formerly polarizing event. FSA Management Group, LLC, was awarded the management contract for the new association, with Keith Howard as exec. v.p.

I'm so happy for the merger not only because it unites us all in one organization, but for the efficiencies we'll all experience in the logistics and loyalties required to support one organization. I believe we'll see better and more financial support for the new organization for some exciting new initiatives, as well.

HFM's Annual Leadership Conference, Aug. 24-28 at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa, Indian Wells, Calif., promises to be more than the fantastic learning and networking experience it's always been. I'm sure this final conference will recap all that HFM has taught us and brought us through the years.

Happily, we all get together again for the exciting debut of AHF's first conference set for the week of June 6, 2010, at the Hilton Austin, Texas. Details are being worked out!

Beth Lorenzini
Editor

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The retail café at Methodist LeBonheur Germantown Hospital; all photos courtesy of Harding Creative, Inc.

FEATURE

ANATOMY OF A WELL-DESIGNED DISHROOM

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By Beth Lorenzini

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"Architects rarely, if ever, start with the dishroom when they're allotting space to support foodservice," says Georgie Shockey, FCSI, principal, Ruck-Shockey Associates, The Woodlands, Texas. Dishroom space is always at a premium, but more alarming is that very few planners do an actual run-through of the dishroom process, especially at peak times, says John Stern, v.p. of business development for Philadelphia-based Insinger Machine Co. No one takes the time to walk through every step from the time soiled ware enters to when it's stored clean. Even fewer try to work through the dishroom functions during peak *and* nonpeak times. As a result, too many designs end up with too many bad surprises when dishwashing begins.

"Can you figure out a way to design a dishroom that efficiently accommodates full staffing at rush times and small crews during slow times?" asks Shockey. "That's a key goal, flexibility."

Other common design mistakes: No room to unload trays from carts on the soiled end; dishracks set too high for employees to move or lift; wrong-sized warewashers; off-grade drains (meaning they're not recessed); poor ventilation; inadequate or utility-wasting waste disposal; no drying room; and no room for racks to off-load clean wares.

Serendipity

At the same ASHFSA conference, imagine our good luck running into Dean Young, director of nutrition and dining services, BryanLGH Medical Center, Lincoln, Neb. He just finished a $400,000, 11-week renovation of his 40-year-old dishroom. A marvel of good planning, it hits note for note all the key points our experts suggest are musts for a well-designed dishroom: plenty of space, the right equipment (in function, size and energy use), proper flow and employee-friendly/FTE-flexible design (in his case, from three to five employees).

The centerpiece of the 24' x 72' room, which was gutted, fully re-tiled and floored with coved, nonslip quarry tile, is the 4-tier rotating tray accumulator from Aerowerks. Dedicated to gathering trays from the retail café, the accumulator is important for the time it buys the staff. "Dishrooms are notorious for bottlenecks," comments Shockey. "If you can eliminate them you'll eliminate daily headaches."

As the accumulator gathers trays, employees can process them; but, when patient meal carts start returning to the kitchen, employees can leave off clearing café trays (the accumulator just holds them in rotation) to empty the carts. Young made sure the design provided space to stage up to six returning patient tray carts at a time, and they position so that one person can unload trays from carts and/or the accumulator simply by pivoting.

Scrapping Savvy

Soiled trays run along a roller conveyor to a scrapping trough equipped with two electric-eye spray rinsers. Hands-free sprays such as

At this start point, employees can unload trays from the café off the accumulator or unload patient meal carts. There's room here for up to six carts. Note the hose, it's one of two used for cleaning.

Silverware Solution

In BryanLGH's new dishroom, two mobile basins sit below the scrap trough to soak the tough stuff; they'd been planned from the get-go. But Young says his favorite add-on – not in the original spec – is the new PowerSoak silverware pre-wash unit. This compact, agitating soaker bath can be built in or roll mobile, and it generates its own heat to warm the water. "Silverware was always an issue," says Young. "But our silverware is clean now." Here's how: Staffers load utensils tines (or eating end) down in cylinders and agitate them in the soaker. The cylinders are sent through the warewasher.

Next, employees turn utensils eating-end up in the cylinders and send them through the warewasher a second time. Then they're poured out into Cambro silverware bins. "If you see a cylinder with tines down, that means it still has one wash to go," says Young. The agitator at the front end really helps the process and is especially effective on salad bar and serving-line utensils from the retail café. "Items heavily coated with mayo, egg, batters and dressings, for example, aren't an issue anymore," he says.

Young's Dishroom Essentials

"We didn't get more space for our new dishroom, we just improved the use of the space we had," says Young of the design he and Lincoln Sysco partners Dale Korbelik and John Katz put together.

Key elements/equipment:

- Tray accumulator
- Pulper (existing)
- Electric-eye sprayers
- Silverware agitator/soaker
- Bi-level soiled ware conveyor (racks top, dishes bottom)
- High-efficiency, flight-type warewasher with side-open doors
- Heated blower
- Secondary, ceiling-mounted ambient blower
- Oscillating wall fans
- 10'-long clean end
- Floor troughs vs. drains for squeegee floor cleaning
- Cart wash (existing)

these, or the recirculating gushers you see on a Salvajor ScrapMaster for instance, are recommended by many designers because "they leave two hands free to clear debris off dishes," says Larry Lanier, FCSI, president, Laschober + Sovich, Woodland Hills, Calif.

While there's no question that disposal systems that recirculate water are the way to go (vs. sending fresh water down the drain), "...engineers and designers really need to be on their game when they put these systems in place," advises Shockey. "They need to ensure that the amount of water going down the drain is adequate to handle the fats, oil and grease generated in scrapping."

At BryanLGH, all debris, except for cans, plastic and glass bottles, travels through the scrap trough to a full-size pulper, another consultant favorite, but an item that either fails to get funded or doesn't fit in a lot of designs. "Our Somat pulper is only seven years old," say Young. "We made sure it was incorporated into the new plan. I wouldn't give it up for anything." Employees pull cans and bottles off trays and toss them into recyclables receptacles near the scrapping trough.

With the pulper in play, the kitchen only needs two additional trash cans. They're 45-gal. brutes, and there's a neat story to go with them. "Back in 1991, we implemented a policy that eliminated the need for employees to lift heavy trash," explains Young. The hospital invested in trash cans that are equipped to be mechanically lifted into a dumpster. "Employees roll cans to the dumpster and it takes care of the rest."

Bi-Level Conveyor

Lifting's been eliminated at the scrapping trough, too. The soiled dish conveyor Young spec'd for BryanLGH was unlike anything he'd ever seen before. It features an upper and lower conveyor and requires employees to slide rather than lift racks full of soiled dishes.

At the trough, employees stack scrapped dishes on a wide ledge in front of them. When 10 or so are stacked, staffers scooch the stacks forward onto the lower slat conveyor. The belt carries them to a loader who loads them into the new Hobart flight-type warewasher.

Scrappers simultaneously sort soiled cups, bowls and beverage ware into color-coded racks angled at shoulder height in front of them. When racks are full, the employees simply slide them forward onto the second, upper conveyor, a gravity roller that feeds into the warewasher, as well, but directly, without help from the loader. "The dish rack supports hang over and drip into the trough," says Young, "And they're removable for cleaning."

In another ingenious design, a tray lowerator cart positions right at the end of the scrapping trough. Emptied trays slide directly into the cart, and, when it's full, an employee just rolls it a couple of feet to the opening of the warewasher for loading.

The upper conveyor features a bridge liftstop (like those bridges that lift to let ships

The upper and lower conveyors meet at the opening to the warewasher. The roller bridge from the upper conveyor, in the lifted position, stops racks from feeding into the machine. A loader stands in the corner by the little control box and loads stacks of dishes from the lower slat conveyor.

The new flight-type warewasher features side-opening doors and easy-to-access service panels below. It's simple to service and keep clean. All the machine steam is captured through one vent and two blowers ensure wares are dry.

pass on waterways). When it's in the up position, the upper conveyor stops, holding racks until the next cycle is set to begin. "What's nice is that we can run the warewasher only as needed and stage soiled ware until we have a full load," explains Young. "But the staging is nice and neat, not backed up and chaotic as it used to be."

Young's new warewasher represents a world of improvement over the ancient unit that occupied the old space, beginning with water and energy savings. *(Water savings are significant on newer machines in general, on the order of 50% to 60%, according to Ken Rossillon, Stero Corp., Petaluma, Calif.)*

Space, Glorious Space

Not only did Young get the benefit of a new machine, but he maximizes its potential by giving it *enough room to operate*. "We positioned the machine so that it's accessible from both sides but nearer to one wall," he says. The old machine ran right down the middle of the room. "We can get into the machine's interior for cleaning and servicing. But positioning the machine closer to one wall opens up lots of space on the other side, which we use to store dollies full of clean dishes."

Young's old machine had doors that lifted up and access panels that required unscrewing to remove. The new machine features doors that open like cupboard doors, so there's no need for a high or recessed ceiling. Additionally, lower service panels just lift up and out and snap back into place without screws. The machine also features a single outlet for steam, vs. two that needed exhausting off the old unit. "All of these details make the warewasher easy to operate, easy to keep clean and easy to service," he says. "And the single vent is efficient, so the environment's really improved."

Other smart purchases have transformed the environment as well: a San-Aire ambient blower was spec'd in addition to the built-in, heated blow dryer already integral to the Hobart. "And we designed in no fewer than 10' on the clean end!" says Young. Between the two blowers and the generous drying room, "our wares are completely dry, finally."

"Failing to provide enough drying space is common and really problematic in a healthcare setting," says Shockey. "Any director will tell you, plastic doesn't dry easily." Ideally, you want a minimum of 8' on the clean end, but most operations are lucky to get 4', and it's simply not enough.

Young also installed a series of wall-mounted, oscillating fans to help dissipate the steamy, humid atmosphere. They dismount for cleaning. Between the blowers on the machine, drying space and the fans, the working condition of the room is light years dryer and more pleasant than the former space, according to Young.

Keeping It Clean

It's ironic that a dishroom, designed to clean dishes, can become one of the grimiest spots in a foodservice operation. Several design elements are helping BryanLGH employees run a clean dishroom. First, instead of typical floor drains, Young specified floor troughs and double checked that they were properly recessed to ensure drainage. "We have two high-pressure hose sprayers on the soiled dish conveyor/scrap trough to spray everything down, and I wanted employees to be able to squeegee the floor dry afterward."

The second key to cleanliness is an existing Champion cart wash. "We simply could not operate without it," says Young. Young's staff uses the automated cart wash to clean dollies, carts, carts loaded with sheet pans and salad bar pans, racks filled with plastic domes, bakers racks, refrigerator storage racks, the rack supports from the scrapping trough and trash cans. "Our new dishroom features a lot of elements that can be disassembled," says Young. "Between the hoses, the warewasher and the cart wash, we keep things pretty clean." And that's the whole idea.