

# Neilson Dining Hall at Rutgers University

By Donna Boss, Contributing Editor

Maximum flexibility was achieved in this new dining hall by the installation of back-up cooking lines at main serving stations and the placement of equipment on mobile carts so pieces can be interchanged as needed to produce highly diversified daily menus.



The focal point of Neilson's marketplace-style servery is a 30-foot Salad/Soup bar positioned beneath a linear chrome ceiling.

**B**uilt during the early '60s, Neilson Dining Hall at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., had been given only one face-lift during its working life, in the late '70s. In 2002, it was scheduled for a long-overdue remodeling, which was to follow a renovation of Busch Dining Hall, another university facility designed to serve primarily students and also some faculty and staff.

"Our mission at Neilson was to bring the back of the house out front, similar to what we did during the project at Busch," explained the project's coordinator, Jim Vernere, manager of Rut-

gers Dining Services Facilities/Purchasing Office. "We also wanted to create interactive excitement and fun, and eliminate the 'mysterious' nature of a back-of-the-house kitchen. Of course, we had to improve on the prior project, so we needed to enhance the flexibility of Neilson's operations. Charlie Sams, director of Dining Services, set the criteria for maximum flexibility and durability without compromising appearance."

In order to accomplish these goals and create a facility that measured up to or surpassed previously set high standards, Rutgers brought in architects and interior designers who redid Busch:

Peter Biber, principal, Lauren Mitchell, project architect, and Linda Patten, director of interior design at The Biber Partnership AIA in Summit, N.J. Following the Biber group's feasibility study, which recommended a more extensive renovation of the building and the servery than had originally been budgeted, foodservice consultant Ken Iversen, owner of Iversen Consulting Group Inc. in Medford, N.J., who had also worked on the earlier on-campus renovation project, was brought onboard for the Neilson job.

"We set out with four main goals to accomplish during this project," recalled Biber. "First, we wanted to change the food-station layout from a traditional servery in *to 74* ◆

A chef's table (left) and cookline (right) are positioned behind the Display Cooking station and at an angle to the Grille.



Photos by Peter Biber, AIA





A 500-square-foot catering kitchen includes a tilting braising skillet, convection and conventional deck ovens, a range, worktables and a bain marie.

there would be a larger traffic flow or more demand at a certain counter,” explained Biber.

Though a substantial amount of stainless steel was applied in the revised servery to help ensure its durability, other materials were selected to add warmth to the room. Wood paneling, for instance, was added to the walls and column covers, and many counter surfaces were constructed of granite. In addition, lighting was selected for its ability to produce a warm yet appropriately dramatic atmosphere. Installed behind the pillow (patterned)-glass front panels of the counters was a kinetic lighting system that allows all

the colors in the spectrum to be displayed as desired to alter the mood of the servery. Other lighting selections include warm fluorescents, as well as halogen and incandescent fixtures, all of which help to illuminate foods in an appetizing manner.

Another benefit of the multi-source lighting is its ability to highlight stations that remain open during slow traffic periods when other points of sale are closed. Customer counts at Neilson now average 500 for breakfast, 1,200 at lunch and up to 1,800 at dinner. According to Vernere, dinner traffic is over projections, “but is easily managed.” During some meal periods, up to half of the transactions take place at the Take-Out station.

While enhancing the ambiance of the servery was a crucial part of the design criteria, so, too, were the layout and selection of equipment that would support the production of the diverse menus served here currently and in the future. Flexibility was accomplished in several ways. “We put a great deal of cooking power into the serving stations, as well as the kitchen, in order to prepare large volumes of food,” explained Iversen. “Many of the menu items are prepared at stations in front of customers. Food is also cooked in areas located behind but near the

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◆ from 73 which all of the cooking was done in the kitchen to a marketplace environment with display cooking and preparation taking place in front of customers. Second, we wanted to add a take-out area. Third, we needed to improve circulation from the servery into two adjacent rooms where daily customers dine and where catered functions are held. And fourth, we wanted to make this a ‘pow!’ facility — to give it an aesthetic blast to make it stand out among all other campus dining locations.”

Added Mitchell, “Dining Services started out looking at the addition of a take-out service in answer to students’ requests. The budget was getting so high that the project team couldn’t justify spending that kind of money without also re-doing the servery.” The more expansive project plan ultimately agreed to, however, required upgrading the building’s entire infrastructure.

In late August 2003, Neilson Dining Hall was re-opened to serve Rutgers’ Douglass and Cook campuses, respectively housing the Women’s College and the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. The Neilson facility includes a 3,270-square-foot marketplace-style servery, a 526-square-foot take-out station, a 1,480-square-foot support kitchen that is partially visible to customers, a 500-square-foot catering kitchen and two dining areas seating a total of 650 customers and occupying 20,000-square-feet.

As customers enter the marketplace servery, they now set foot onto a porcelain tile floor, which was selected for its durability and light color that contributes to an “airy” atmosphere. The space’s focal point is unquestionably a 30-foot Salad/Soup/bar, above which is positioned a linear chrome ceiling that extends over about half of the servery and undulates in a curved design. An assortment of light fixtures infuses a dramatic energy in this newly redefined area.

In addition to its Salad/Soup bar, the new servery also houses Pizza and Pasta, Take-Out, Sauté, Entrée, Grille, Deli, Desserts and Beverages stations.

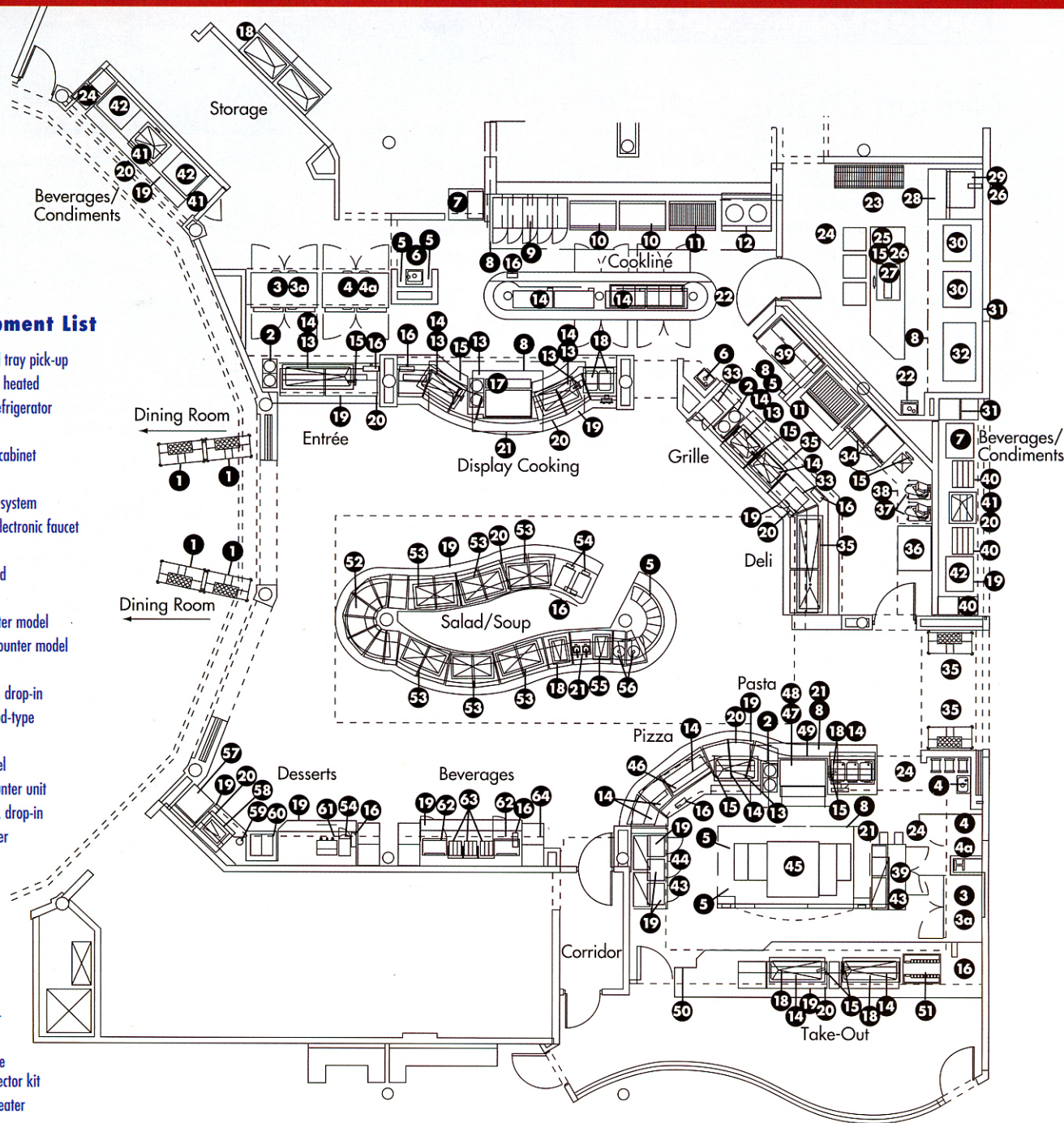
The curved outline in the chrome ceiling is complemented by convex and concave curves in the serving-station counters. “We used the curves to create larger areas between counters where we knew



A mobile cart holding a four-foot, eight-burner range is positioned most often at the Pasta station.



# Neilson Dining Hall at Rutgers University



## Key Equipment List

1. Silverware and tray pick-up
2. Dish dispenser, heated
3. Roll-through refrigerator
- 3a. Roll-in racks
4. Roll-in heated cabinet
- 4a. Roll-in racks
5. Fire protection system
6. Hand sink w/electronic faucet
7. Roll-in freezer
8. Ventilation hood
9. Fryers
10. Griddle, counter model
11. Charbroiler, counter model
12. Wok range
13. Hot/cold pan, drop-in
14. Heat lamp, rod-type
15. Faucet
16. Electrical panel
17. Hot plate, counter unit
18. Hot food well, drop-in
19. Custom counter
20. Sneeze guard
21. Hood façade
22. Custom worktable
23. Shelving, louvered
24. Pan racks
25. Chef's counter
26. Water connector hose and gas connector kit
27. Baine marie heater
28. Flour trough
29. Tilting skillet
30. Convection ovens, mobile
31. S/s wall panels
32. Deck oven
33. Display case, non-refrigerated
34. Cook/hold cabinets
35. 7-well cold pan
36. Refrigerated display case, self-serve
37. Slicer
38. Cabinet, enclosed, w/sink
39. Refrigerated pizza-top counter
40. Condiment rack
41. Cold food unit, drop-in
42. Ice/beverage dispenser
43. Shelving, wall-mounted
44. Table, cutting/boxing
45. Conveyor bake oven
46. Heated shelf, built-in
47. Hot plate
48. Mobile custom equipment stand w/work ledge
49. Deco glass
50. Order entry unit
51. Ice dispenser
52. 6-well cold pan
53. 3-well cold pan
54. Hot chocolate dispenser
55. Cold pan
56. Drop-in food warmers
57. Soft-serve machine
58. Drop-in cold pan
59. Dipper well
60. Ice cream dipping cabinet
61. Coffee brewer
62. Refrigerated bulk milk dispenser
63. Juice dispenser
64. Rack dolly



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◆ from 74 stations in full view of the customers.”

Most major pieces of equipment installed at Neilson can also be moved from station to station and into the support kitchen as needed. “We accomplished this by placing two four-foot charbroilers, two four-foot griddles, two four-foot, eight-burner ranges, two portable three-well hot food units and one set of three fryers on equally sized, custom-made mobile carts,” commented Iversen, who added that the equipment itself is standard size. Each mobile piece has a flexible gas hose and retaining cables, so they are easy to plug in and out of serving counters, each of which have reciprocal gas and electrical connections.

“We call this sort of equipment package a ‘plug and play’ setup,” said Vernere, who added that switching equipment’s connections and location usually takes staff about five minutes. “For example, at breakfast, the Sauté station typically requires a range for omelets. At lunch, we may switch out the range for the griddle, which we use to make fajitas. Then, at dinner, we may bring in the charbroiler to prepare steaks.” Even the hot food wells used at the stations here can be moved to accommodate service to conference and summer groups, and at special themed dinners.

Similar to most college foodservices, the most popular station at Neilson is the Pizza and Pasta area. As customers watch, pizza ingredients are assembled and placed in a double-deck conveyor oven to bake.

Also offered daily at this station are three types of pasta. After the pasta has been cooked in kettles in the back of the support kitchen and shocked in cold water, it is placed in refrigerated wells alongside three sauces. Customers select combinations of pasta and sauces, which are placed by a cook in a sauté pan and quickly re-heated. Customers can then top their portions with various ingredients such as Parmesan cheese and peppers that are displayed in bins on the station’s serving counter. In addition, baked lasagna and calzones are placed in hot wells for self-service.

Sharing the back counter with the pizza/pasta station is the



Holding wells for hot and cold foods and pass-through shelving were installed at the chef’s counter, which supports the Entrée and other stations.

take-out area. “We decided to place take-out here because pizza is a popular to-go item and the two stations can share equipment needed for its preparation,” explained Vernere. Hot entrées and sandwiches, such as meatball hoagies, are dished up and packaged for take-out from the line. Cold entrées such as submarine sandwiches also can be served from the line. Refrigerated display cases hold pre-packaged take-out fare such as sandwiches and salads.

When customers enter the servery from the main entrance, stations are laid out to encourage them to move clockwise through the servery. They first encounter the Entrée station, which features “blueplate” specials, meat loaf, prime rib, potatoes, fried chicken and other dishes made with equipment situated in the FOH kitchen.

The adjacent Sauté (display cooking) station features dishes ranging from stir-fries to sautéed omelets, pancakes, fajitas, steaks, fish filets and veal picatta prepared by a cook. Directly behind the sauté counter is a chef’s counter, which is adjacent to a cookline that includes a charbroiler, griddle, fryers and a wok. During busy traffic periods, food is prepared on the cookline and placed in holding pans at the Sauté station so customers can help themselves.

Next, customers encounter the Deli and Grille stations, which were designated as two separate areas but function as one. At the deli, two automatic slicers were installed to cut meats that are placed in refrigerated cold air pans along with other ingredients for make-your-own deli sandwiches. (Made-to-order sandwiches could be prepared here if staff decided to change service styles.) At the grill section, a staff member cooks chicken breasts, burgers, steaks, grilled vegetables and barbecued meats on a charbroiler or griddle. A smoker was added recently.

Continuing clockwise is the Pizza and Pasta area. After selecting main course items, including salads from the centrally located Salad/Soup bar, customers at Neilson can stop by the Desserts station where sweets that have been made at Rutgers’ central bakery are displayed, and at an adjacent Beverages station. Behind these stations is the dishwashing area. Food preparation also takes place in a catering kitchen, which is located to the right of the chef’s counter.

Designing a college dining hall to meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s sophisticated customers requires projections to be made about food and service trends. By designing in maximum flexibility with interchangeable equipment, the project team that conducted Neilson Dining Hall’s renovation found a practical way to address customers’ current diversity of dining desires while preparing for the uncertainty of the future.

### Design Capsule

**N**eilson Dining Hall, located on the Douglass campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., features several marketplace-style serving stations: Salad/Soup, Pizza and Pasta, Take-Out, Sauté, Entrée, Grille, Deli, Desserts and Beverages. Key pieces of cooking equipment have been placed on a mobile cart so they are interchangeable among stations and kitchen cooklines. The \$6 million, 30,000-square-foot facility includes a 3,270-square-foot marketplace-style servery, a 526-square-foot take-out station, a 1,480-square-foot kitchen, a 500-square-foot catering kitchen and two dining areas seating a total of 650 customers and occupying 20,000-square-feet. A made-to-order smoothie bar is located in the dining room. The equipment cost was \$1 million. Daily, Neilson serves up to 1,800 student-, faculty-, and visitor-customers at dinner; up to 1,200 at lunch; and up to 500 at breakfast. Meal plans are accepted; a

flat, all-you-can-eat fee is charged to cash customers. Two seating areas accommodate a total of 650 diners. 35 FTEs. Most customers are on a meal plan. Cash customers pay \$6 for breakfast, \$10 for lunch and \$12 for dinner.

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