

Food & Drink

EXECUTIVE  
JOURNAL

FALL 2009

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**UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND DINNING SERVICES  
COOKING UP CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS**

**THE MAGAZINE FOR LEADING INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES**

# Cooking Up Campus Improvements

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*Written By Mark Fitzgerald*

Before its renovation, the Heilman Dining Hall at the University of Richmond felt outdated and limited in variety and production ability. Its ambiance had grown tired and its serving system inefficient in light of the rising culinary demands and expectations of a fairly sophisticated and international clientele.

“It was a typical straight line cafeteria,” recalls Glenn Pruden, University of Richmond Dining Services executive chef. “The old scatter system broke up your typical cafeteria into lines for pasta, veggies, home cooking and grilled burgers and fries.”

## **Major Investment**

About four years ago, the University embarked on a \$9.9 million project to renovate Heilman. The vision was to create an expansive 9,400 square foot marketplace servery with ample display cooking options, including a soup, bread and salad bar, a brick oven for baking pizza, made-to-order pasta, grilled sandwiches, vegan and vegetarian options and numerous international foods prepared on a Mongolian grill, as well as a Dolce Vita dessert station featuring baked goods, hand-dipped ice cream and other sweets.

“To build your own kitchen is one of those things you dream of as a chef,” says Pruden, who had a budget of \$2.5 million

to purchase state-of-the-art cooking equipment. “Now we have big burners out front and chefs who customize dishes to each student’s preference.” Omelets and panini, for instance, are made to order and go directly from the pan to the plate.

To allow all this attention to detail, the University of Richmond Dining Services has some 200 employees and boasts about \$15 million in revenue. During renovation, the design staff created a thorough phasing plan that allowed sections of the kitchen and servery to remain operational even as new sections of both areas were constructed. In August 2006, after an aggressive two-phase, 18-month overhaul, the work was completed.

“The dining venue is an excellent example of what’s possible and fun through implementing a display cooking concept,” Pruden adds, noting the addition of a pho noodle bar and a Latin American station featuring pork carnitas, beef barbacoa and chicken tinga, along with flour tortillas, fiesta rice, pinto beans and assorted toppings.

“Most of the students here have been exposed to a lot of different foods,” points out Pruden. “They’ve traveled and have experienced many restaurant concepts, so they expect more than an older generation might.”



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*"We've drawn from the food court model in some ways," acknowledges the chef. "But we're entirely self-operated. For example, we do our own pizzas, so we don't have to pay a royalty fee to Pizza Hut."*

—Glenn Pruden,  
Assistant Director CEC

While some universities have brought in various chains such as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and KFC to satisfy a variety of tastes, the University of Richmond has done everything in-house.

*"We've drawn from the food court model in some ways," acknowledges the chef. "But we're entirely self-operated. For example, we do our own pizzas, so we don't have to pay a royalty fee to Pizza Hut."*

### Greener than Green

Each day the staff makes about 200 pizzas, and, on average, 3,600 hundred meals. "We're able to cook most things to order," says Pruden. "We've found that this considerably reduces the amount of food that's wasted."

Another benefit of the renovation was that it rendered several back-of-the-house environmental investments, such as a new exhaust system designed to curb energy consumption, two in-house pulpers to help reduce landfill contributions and other energy-efficient equipment.

"Most of what I do now has to take into account energy conservation and how to cut back on waste," Pruden notes. "Three Fridays a month we go tray less and do a waste study on how much food is thrown away. This has really



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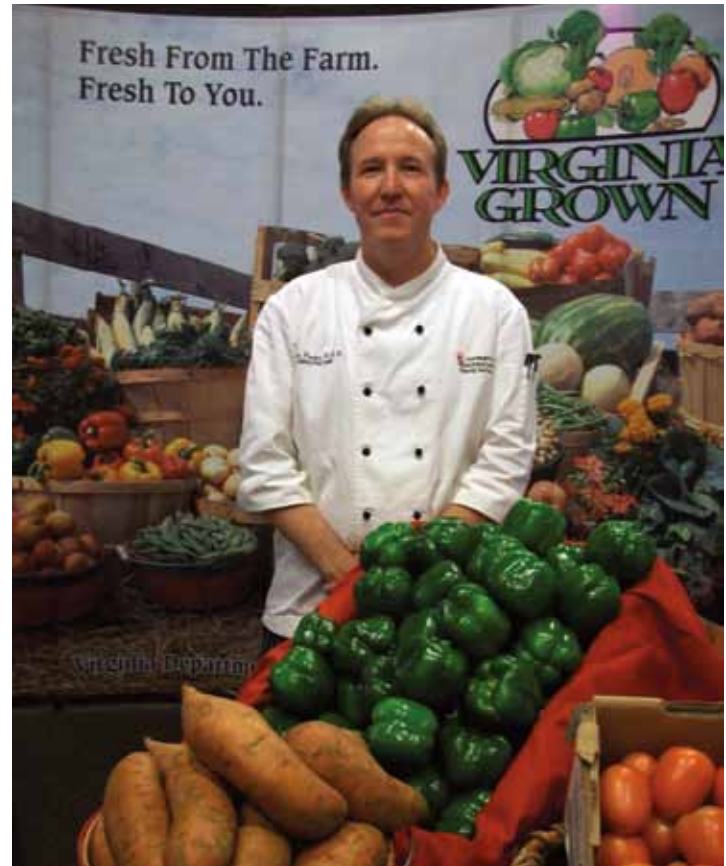
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helped educate students to only get what they think they're going to eat."

The proof is in the pudding, so to speak. But here at the University of Richmond Dining Services, the proof has really been in what Pruden has accomplished. A feast for the eyes as well as the palate, his kitchen is built on the stuff that dreams are made of, and the level of delight students have expressed in it has truly been stupendous. ■



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