

Case Study

A New Dining Service and a New Operator

One of a series of reports of the results of Clarion projects, illustrating ways in which dining services are improved and new opportunities to increase value are created. Names and identifying details are omitted to protect our client's anonymity.

Dining Insights, Spring 2013

A dynamic, young company faced a dilemma common to many rapidly-growing firms: It was outgrowing its headquarters' leased space.

Should they add space at their present location, move to larger leased space, or build their own headquarters?

THE SITUATION: Management decided its best course was to build their own headquarters to suit their needs exactly, big enough to permit further growth of the on-site population, now under 500. They chose a site in a rural area, convenient to interstate highways with enough room for further expansion when needed.

The architect created a state-of-the-art building and retained Raymond/Raymond Associates, our long-time dining facilities design collaborator, to plan the new dining facilities.

THE OBJECTIVE: The company had never had an on-site dining service. Management know what it wanted as an end result, but was not certain how to achieve that result.

They wanted a café that would be attractive to employees, featured healthy foods in a sustainable manner and was a strong support to their company's wellness program. They had a busy schedule of conferences and meetings that often included refreshments or light luncheons, supplied from outside sources. They also planned executive luncheons and dinners and special events, including some for their new community.

The operator would have to be capable of providing all these services as well as serving employees in the café.

PLANNING THE CAFÉ: Raymond/ Raymond brought Clarion in to develop the concepts, advise management on the project and manage the selection of a food service contractor. Angela Phelan, Clarion's senior vice president, worked with RRA principal Brett Farrell on developing the concepts and design.

Fresh, healthy foods, prepared to order to the fullest extent possible and sustainability were the focus of the planning.

The spacious café's windows look out on the rolling countryside. The servery, open to the seating area, permits most food preparation to be performed at the serving line in view of customers.

Featured is a glass-enclosed rotisserie, where customers can watch chickens, vegetables and other foods slowly rotating as they roast. Pizza also is prepared at the line, along with grilled foods and deli sandwiches. A salad-and-soup bar is the centerpiece of the servery. An open front refrigerated display case features grab-and-go salads, sandwiches and desserts.

PICKING AN OPERATOR: While café design and construction was proceeding, we started the competitive selection process for an operator.

Four companies that were a good fit for the size and type of operation were selected. The selected company would have to provide extensive conference catering services as well as major special events.

Ms Phelan took company executives to see the invited proposers' current services so they would understand their capabilities.

The Request for Proposals described the operating requirements and contract terms. Proposals were required to follow a specific outline and use forms included to present their financial projections.

Two companies were selected as "finalists." Their representatives, including senior executives, district manager and candidate chef-managers were interviewed in two lengthy sessions each.

Both companies were well qualified and successfully operated comparable dining services. While they approached the project from different viewpoints, each understood the company's objectives and had a comprehensive plan for meeting them. Each presented a competent, personable young man as candidate chef-manager.

Which one to pick?

THE OUTCOME: The decision was based on several factors.

- One proposer seemed more attuned to the company's interest in healthy dining and wellness.
- Executives who visited that proposers' other operations met and were impressed with the candidate chef-manager, both his culinary skills and personality.

The new headquarters and dining service will open in late April.

CLARION'S ROLE: We were able to integrate all elements of the project, from menu development, operational system and facility design to management of the selection process for the operator and negotiation of an equitable contract.