

BETHANY LIFE COMMUNITIES-DINING SERVICES

“What’s for dinner?” If you’re like us, that is often a minor dilemma, but at Bethany Life Communities (BLC) Dining Services it’s a big operation. In 2005, about 300,000 meals were served by the BLC dining staff! At \$1.1 million, dietary expenses were the third largest line item in the 2005 BLC budget. There are thirty-seven employees on the dietary staff at Bethany Manor, and ten more dedicated to Timberland Village and Cedar Place. Their efforts are essential to the overall success of BLC.

Heading up this operation is Sonja Haferbier, BLC’s Director of Dining Services. With a quick smile and an obvious enthusiasm and commitment to her customers---BLC’s residents and tenants, Sonja told us about Dining Services. She first worked at Bethany Manor from 1973 to 1984. During this time, she completed two years of study in Restaurant Management at Iowa State. Sonja returned to BLC in 2002, and now, ironically, one of her projects is renovating the dining facilities she initially helped design thirty years ago.

By far, Bethany Manor is the biggest food service operation for Sonja and her staff. With breakfast, lunch and supper every day of the year, about 570 meals are served daily at Bethany Manor. The Bethany Manor kitchen also provides meals for Cedar Place tenants who can choose options for provisioning of different meals. At Timberland Village, Assisted Living tenants are served three meals per day (included in their rental package) from the modern kitchen facilities at the Village. Independent Living tenants at Timberland can subscribe to daily lunch service if they wish.

BLC Dining Services also serves the community under various government contracts. Meals on Wheels lunches are prepared five days per week for about 25-30 Story City seniors. The Head Start kids at Bethany Manor are served breakfast and lunch five days a week, and Congregate Meals are prepared four days a week for eligible people in Story City.

Sonja is very enthusiastic about significant changes on the horizon in Dining Services. The Foundation is spearheading fundraising for major dining room renovations through its “Breaking Bread Together” campaign. This will eventually enable a ceiling-to-floor remodeling along with new tables, chairs and a fireplace to add to the ambience. Some initial kitchen remodeling and equipment rearrangements will soon facilitate “tableside service”. Instead of pushing carts of food around the dining area, the tableside approach will feature staff delivering trays of food choices to each

table for resident selection. This will be less institutional and more like a restaurant dining experience.

As generations change, trends in food service also change. Roast beef and mashed potatoes will probably be a popular choice for a long time. But now, the Dining Services staff is emphasizing a wider variety of choices. This means serving, for example, Mexican, Oriental, vegetarian or other popular entrees. Along with a wider menu, residents are able to choose between two options for the components of each meal---from the main entrée, to vegetables and desserts. Another trend that residents appreciate is that more food is prepared from scratch in the kitchen rather than being bought frozen and then cooked.

The dining staff currently works both the day and evening shifts. In the future, 24-hour dining service is possible. “People stay up later and have different life styles. We’re here for the residents and community, and you feel so-o-o-o good when you make someone happy!” said Sonya. While change is constant, the focus on excellent dining services remains the same.

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