

Cura Hospitality – Farm Fresh and Patient Driven

By Kathleen Ganster

Concierge and room service are not words commonly associated with hospital food, but they are words that Cura Hospitality uses when describing their food services. Cura, a food service provider, prides itself on innovative services and fresh, healthy food choices for patients at over 70 hospitals and senior living communities in the mid-Atlantic area. Cura is part of the Eat 'n Park Hospitality Group.



Jamie Moore, director of Sourcing and Sustainability for Eat'n Park Hospitality Group in the zucchini field.

St. Clair Hospital has worked with Cura Hospitality for slightly more than two years according to Joan Massella, vice president and CNO at St. Clair. "We liked the fact that they were local and that people knew their reputation," she said. "Plus, we liked the fact that they made the food fresh using ingredients from local farmers." Since Cura not only provides food services for patients, but the staff and visitors to the hospital, that was a real plus for the staff. "We liked the choices, the healthy alternatives, they provided us."

Chris Vitsas, general manager of Cura at St. Clair, said the company is indeed dedicated to local farmers, which often does translate into the freshest ingredients. "We work with a local farm source program. It is our objective to buy local whenever possible and we cook from scratch," he said. That means taking advantage of local bounty and specials focusing around those ingredients. "A lot of times this also means a tremendous change. For example, instead of frozen beans, we will have fresh beans. And if there is a good top round available, we can use it that night for a special."

Even meal delivery is different. Each patient is assigned a concierge who visits, with menus, to discuss meal options. Lunch and dinner are chosen that day, not the night before as in many facilities. "That way, if they aren't feeling so good, they can choose what they feel like eating at that time," Vitsas said.

The concierge gets to know the patients and their meal choices. "They remember if you take two sugars with your coffee," said Vitsas. They even dress the part, in white dress shirts, black vests and black pants. "It makes a difference," he said.

Staff is trained extensively to be able to steer patients on therapeutic diets in the right direction. And a full-time chef oversees meal production.



Cura Executive Chef Bill Hockenberry, preparing fresh and healthy food at a wellness event hosted by St. Clair Hospital.



Personalized Room Service at St. Clair Hospital.

Because the meal services are also available to hospital visitors, Cura takes their needs into consideration. "At the cafe, we have a wide choice of coffees so if someone wants to grab a latte and hook up to Internet, they can get some work done while they are visiting," he said.

Indiana Regional Medical Center is new to the Cura system as of April 1, and so far, so good. Bob Gongaware, senior vice president, said Indiana Regional, like St. Clair Hospital, was attracted to the fresh foods and cooking from scratch philosophy. "We also liked the personalized room service. Our patient centered care is excellent and this adds to our care."

And also like the folks at St. Clair, Gongaware liked the healthy food options that are provided for the hospital employees. "We have a commitment to our employees," he said.

Donald Redshaw, Jr., Cura Hospitality general manager, said that the first round of attention at Indiana was on revamping the cafeteria and services to staff. The full-time chef began May 10 and the patient care services are now in the transition period with full services slated to be in place by July.

Redshaw also emphasized the fresh food approach Cura has to its meals. "We make our mashed potatoes from scratch rather than using dried potatoes. If we serve anything that is breaded, it is breaded in house, not frozen. And we buy from local farmers whenever possible, so we can get the freshest cauliflower available," he said.

And the fact that it is part of the Eat 'n Park Hospitality Group allows Cura to take advantage of its buying power and personnel expertise. "That was another reason that we were attracted to Cura," said Gongaware. "The Eat 'n Park brand is very well known and respected in Western Pennsylvania. Their core values were a good fit with our organization."

For more information about Cura Hospitality visit www.curahospitality.com. T

Choose healthy, stay healthy

Choosing the right foods while eating out can always be a bit tricky, but the Eat 'n Park Hospitality Group is dedicated to making easy for guests. Kevin O'Connell, vice president of marketing for Eat 'n Park, gave several suggestions for healthy meal selection.

"We have the Eat 'n Smart menu which makes it very simple, but there is also a list on the back of the menu with the calorie, carb and sodium content for many of our food items," said O'Connell. There are also suggested celiac friendly items, vegetarian selections and reduced sodium choices listed.

Eat 'n Park also will prepare meals to the customer's request. "We can do whatever the guests want," he said.

Since 2002, the Hospitality Group has been purchasing from a local food coop of over 120 local farms for fresh produce and other items, said O'Connell. These fresh foods are brought to the tables at the Eat 'n Park restaurants. "We were doing from farmer to table long before it was popular," he said.