

What's cooking at Capitol Campus?

By Jim Kushlan

It was one of those daily things you just don't question. But as I stood before the Potpourri special in the Lion's Den one day, it hit me: "Where does this stuff come from?"

I figured someone had to find out, so I assumed I had been specially chosen and took off to find out what happens on the other side of the Lion's Den and Dining Hall counters.

"Most of the food we prepare from scratch," said JoAnn Coleman, Food Service supervisor.

"It's not like we just bring it in and zap it."

Penn State has its own recipe file, she said.

"We use standardized recipes and they're developed in the test kitchen at main campus."

Standardized recipes and menus allow for uniform quality throughout the university, Coleman said, adding that's not always true, because of the variety of cooks.

You might wonder just what goes on in that test kitchen up at University Park. Whose taste buds decide what's good or ghastly?

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Food Service Supervisor**

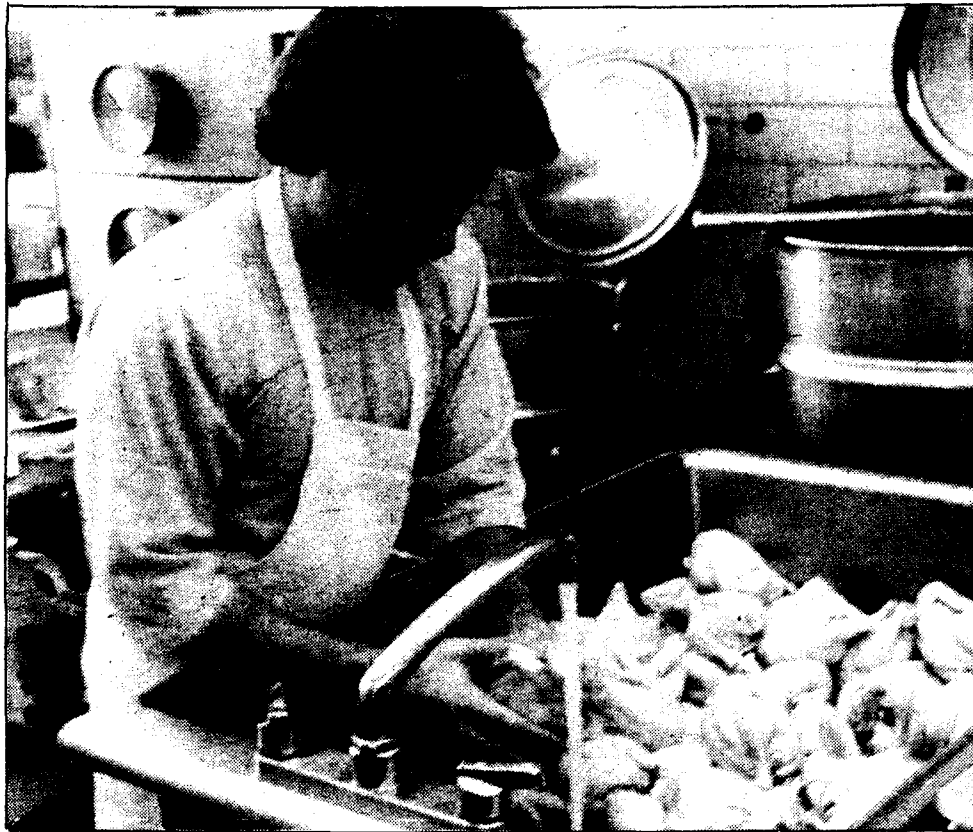
"Whenever they try a recipe at the test kitchen," Coleman said, "they have samplings."

Students sit in on samplings and give their opinions, she said.

Not only does University Park supply the recipes, it also supplies the raw materials. Coleman told me a butcher shop at main campus supplies the meat and a bakery there supplies bread, pastries and cookies.

"The only things we do purchase locally are milk, produce and ice cream," she said, adding potato chips and soft pretzels to that list.

Well, part of the mystery was cleared up. I knew where the recipes were from, and I knew the



Student worker Louis Panzarella helps prepare Cornish game hens for a holiday dinner.

origins of the "scratch" everything is made from. One piece of the puzzle remained: who turns all this into lunch?

Now, we have all seen the people preparing our food right in front of us at the grill in the Lion's Den or in line at the Dining Hall. But we never see the people making the Lion's Den's Potpourri specials or the Dining Hall dinners.

I visited both the Dining Hall kitchen and the other side of the Lion's Den counter.

In the Dining Hall kitchen, I met Guy Zeigler, food preparer. He was making stuffing for a special holiday dinner featuring Cornish game hens and Seafood Newburg.

"I've been doing this since I was about 16 years old," said Zeigler, who has been cooking at Capitol Campus for six years.

"I've cooked in hospitals, in the Navy, a couple of convalescent homes, Cocoa Inn over in Hershey (now closed)," he said.

Zeigler, along with Kay Walker, are the main cooks in the Dining Hall. Their kitchen prepares both the Dining Hall fare and the Lion's Den's Potpourri special.

The Potpourri special: that's where this whole quest had started. I remembered someone had told me the special was simply last night's Dining Hall leftovers. I asked Coleman about this.

Indeed, she said, the Potpourri is sometimes left over from the Dining Hall. But often it isn't.

"If we have casseroles, we tell them (the cooks) to make six, and

they'll make eight and not cook two," Coleman told me. The next day, those extra casseroles would be cooked and served as the Potpourri special.

With my newfound knowledge of Capitol Campus food, I started to wonder about the other side of the counter, the students' side. I wanted to know what students eat, when given a choice, and what they say to the workers about the food.

I often eat in the Lion's Den and, for some reason, I feel the choice between the Potpourri and the grill is a sort of test. I feel like I'm eating right if I have the Potpourri special and that eating

too often at the grill is being like a little kid, eating what he wants regardless of nutrition. I wondered if other students felt that way.

Probably not. Mary Alice (Harv) Pittman, a cook in the Lion's Den, said, "I think mostly, the students eat at the grill."

"It depends on what you're serving but I think the majority of the students eat things like cheeseburgers and fries," she said.

Pittman said she enjoys dealing with the students in the Lion's Den.

"We joke around with the kids. That's the nice part of working down here," she said.

"We have time to talk. Not too much, though."

When the students talk to the workers about the food in the Lion's Den, Pittman said, "They kid. They say it's greasy this or greasy that."

But the students do say they like the food, she added.

Coleman said things are the same in the Dining Hall. The students have a lot of pent-up complaints from their day, she said, and they let them out by complaining about the food.

"We're there all the time, and they see us more than anybody else," she said, so the workers hear a lot of grumbling about the food.

Still, students do give some compliments, she said.

"On special dinners, they'll say, 'Thanks, that was very nice,'" Coleman said.

"Even though you get those complaints, one or two of these compliments makes up for it."



In the Dining Hall kitchen, food preparers Jeff Bratina (left) and Guy Zeigler (right), prepare a special holiday dinner.

Photos by Jim Kushlan