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A Tasty Renovation

University of Dayton

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A $7 million renovation will transform outdated dining areas in Kennedy Union into three "micro-restaurants" and a café-bakery offering expanded food choices, longer hours, hot breakfasts and significantly increased seating.

Paula Chambers, assistant vice president for auxiliary services, said plans have long been in the works to renovate Kennedy Union dining areas, which serve more than 3,500 customers daily during the
school year and haven't been updated in more than 25 years. A final vote on the project will come during the board of trustees executive committee meeting in April.

"For a long time, we've heard from our customers about ways we could make the dining experience better for them," she said. "In designing the renovation, we kept in mind the many different ways our campus community uses the dining areas as well as the broad range of foods they'd like to be available."

Chambers is especially excited about the first-floor Barrett dining room, which dining services plans to operate as an Au Bon Pain café-bakery with soups, hot breakfasts, hearty entrees, sandwiches, salads and mouth-watering bakery items.

"Soups and salads are by far the most popular items with Barrett's current faculty and staff customers," she said. "We think they will be very pleased with the quality and variety offered by the café, and pleased that it will be open throughout the day and in the summer."

The café will offer foods ranging from breakfast to late-night snacks, hours of operation will be extended from early morning to about 10 p.m. and will be open year-round, seven days a week, she said. The Marianist dining room will be retained for the exclusive lunchtime use of faculty and staff, with plenty of seating to serve those customers.

There's a great demand on campus for healthy, high-quality food and places for students to gather and study, Chambers said. Faculty, staff and students say they want plenty of choices and extended hours for food service. Chambers added the renovation will better utilize space in KU and offer more varied dining experiences tailored to different groups of customers.

The ground floor will follow the model of the highly successful Virginia W. Kettering Residence Hall dining facility, and feature distinct serving and dining areas offering fresh salad, grilled items and pizza.

With the growing popularity of international flavors and requests from members of the University's Chinese community, a separate micro-restaurant will serve authentic Asian food with a menu developed in-house by dining services staff and chefs, as with the popular Middle Eastern area at VWK.

One goal of the project is to increase after-hours seating for students to gather and study; the renovation will add more than 130 seats bringing the total number of after-hours seating to 400, Chambers said.

Funded by dining services, the project will begin this summer when catering operations permanently
move to 1700 South Patterson Building and the franchise application is finalized with Au Bon Pain. The food court will close in November and the Barrett dining area will close in December. The two dining areas will reopen in August 2017, along with separately funded upgrades to KU lobby and Torch Lounge.

Finding places to serve 3,500 customers during the renovation will be a challenge, Chambers said, but they are working on developing additional food options and temporary dining spaces close to Kennedy Union.

For example, Hangar will offer "grab and go" salads and sandwiches and ground-floor space in Chaminade Hall will offer food service and seating for about 200. Dining services is also exploring a food truck.

Chambers said while dining services at many other campuses have been outsourced, this investment ensures University staff and students will continue to serve campus, tailoring menus for the community's needs and making every effort to keep prices reasonable.

"We are proud of our national reputation as an exceptional dining program with a high level of customer satisfaction," she said. "With this investment, we are building on that reputation, offering more sophisticated food choices, more attractive dining areas and far better utilization of space in Kennedy Union around the clock.

"And we are committed to minimizing disruption to our customers while the construction is taking place. We can promise you it will be worth the wait."

Chambers said dining services is also planning a variety of communications to launch in the fall including a continually updated webpage and videos to keep the campus informed about the renovation, construction timeline and food options.

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