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Fresh & Made-To-Order

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A major renovation of dining facilities in the Virginia W. Kettering Residence Hall will give University of Dayton students what they want — lots of fresh food choices, prepared to order in a restaurant environment.

Want freshly baked artisan breads, signature sandwiches and salads? Check.

Want fresh burritos custom-made before your eyes? Check.

How about a master of Asian food creating sushi as you watch? Check.

The \$3.9 million renovation set to open in the fall will convert VWK's long cafeteria into two theme restaurants that borrow some of the most popular trends in restaurants today, says Paula Smith, director of dining services.

"In focus groups with students over the past three years, they told us they wanted something different from the other dining facilities," Smith said. "They're more sophisticated about food, and they want lots of options for fresh food prepared right in front of them."

One of the theme restaurants will specialize in fresh foods from around the world. A giant round grill, called a Mongolian grill, will offer students the opportunity to select vegetables, a meat such as chicken or steak, sauces and spices for a customized dish. Southwest food such as tacos and burritos also will be cooked to order, Smith said. The restaurant will focus on lunch and dinner service, with hours from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

"Sushi also will be on the menu," Smith said. "We are contracting with a local sushi chef who will prepare made-to-order sushi several days a week. When we've offered this in the past, it has been very, very popular with students."

The second theme restaurant will borrow ideas from the Panera chain, offering artisan breads, baked on site. The café will feature signature sandwiches and salads as well as an assortment of hot dishes and omelets, Smith said. It will open at 7 a.m. for early risers and stay open until 1 a.m. the next morning to service night owls.

"Unlike a lot of colleges and universities, we won't be offering a salad bar," Smith said. "Both Marycrest and Kennedy Union have salad bars, and our goal is to provide our customers with as many options as we can for their meal plans."

Smith's staff has already demonstrated they are on the right track with their approach to dining services upgrades. The Marycrest renovation received national recognition in 2010 from the National Association of College and University Food Services, with a silver award in its annual dining awards competition.

The new VWK restaurants are in line with the latest offerings in college and university dining facilities. The "2011 College Food Trends" list developed by food service giant Sodexo, puts made-to-order fare as one of the hottest trends.

Smith said the VWK dining hall hasn't been updated since the building was constructed in 1987, so the renovation includes upgrades to major mechanical and kitchen equipment.

And the renovation is much more than a facelift, Smith said. Dining services staff will undergo extensive training in order to ensure the new food choices are served up fast, fresh and tasty.

"We believe we'll get students from the neighborhoods," she said. "We're pretty confident it's going to be popular."

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