



From left: the kitchen at Pahrump Valley Culinary School; preparing bread at the start of another day

Top of the class

San Diego-based **Richard Dieli** has boosted an already enviable reputation by delivering projects for Palm Springs schools and Pahrump Valley Culinary School. Jackie Mitchell reports

For Richard Dieli FCSI, principal of Dieli Murawka Howe (DMH) Foodservice Design, based in San Diego, California, designing and specifying equipment for a central kitchen to serve up to 30,000 school meals a day was a challenge. The project for the Palm Springs Unified School District involved designing a kitchen efficient enough to supply meals to 27 schools, including elementary, middle and high schools.

Working closely with Wanda Grant, foodservice director for the district, and architects Ruhnau Ruhnau Clarke, the first step for Dieli was to “survey the schools in the district and look at the logistics of

bringing food in”. DMH also had to take into account the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) new requirements for school meals. These call for a wider variety of fresh produce and more meals produced from scratch, so DMH had to allow for adequate space for extra preparation areas and equipment.

“We had to anticipate the needs for the next 25 years and make sure the kitchen will adapt to changes,” he says. “We spent a lot of time upfront understanding what the district needed, and prepared a 250-page specification document with 75 pages of drawings. The design had to take into account the way

meals are produced, how you get the raw materials into the kitchen and the school meals out. We also had to make sure there was no cross-contamination through the processes. The overall objectives were to offer more choices for schools and remain committed to what the students want to eat while satisfying nutritional values.”

The 25,000 square-foot kitchen contains about 60% storage space. “We needed a lot of storage space so all the raw materials could be received,” says Dieli.

The areas include standard cooking lines, a pizza production centre, bakery area, catering area for school functions, packaging area and a warewashing area >



“Richard Dieli is the ultimate professional. He knows what will and won’t work in a kitchen and has the knowledge to get his point across to the architects, engineers and contractors. He never misses an appointment and is available whenever we need him. When he is out of the area we have access to his office staff to resolve issues in his absence. Richard has become one of the family, our staff just love him - even to the point that he participated on our Palm Springs Unified School District chefs’ competition team. He is an awesome chef and his expertise is invaluable.”

Wanda Grant, foodservice director, Palm Springs Unified School District

equipped to handle as many as 1,000 dirty pans. A separate test kitchen is used for menu development. “For example, a dish might work well for 20, but will it work for 500?” says Dieli.

In the central kitchen, staff work in a large cook-chill area to produce, rapidly chill and refrigerate menu items from scratch. “Depending on the complexity of the product, (blast-chilled foods) can be stored up to 45 days,” he says. The cook-chill process enables a large number of meals to be prepared, then transferred via a pumping station into one-gallon, heat-resistant bags. These bags are then chilled using a variety of methods. “All products then have to be tagged with the name of the school they are going to,” says Dieli.

All production cycles are closely monitored and recorded via temperature and time charts, as dictated by hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP). Food cooked in this fashion includes chilli, pasta, chicken in sauces, macaroni cheese and stews. “The food is then transported in insulated carts to the schools, where it is put into a refrigerator until ready to be used,” says Dieli. “Minimal handling of the food is important, so the meals are put into carts and from there the food goes straight into the ovens. The meals are then reheated



Staff work quickly in a large cook-chill area to prepare and refrigerate menu items that can be stored for up to 45 days

and emptied into serving pans – the dirty serving pans are returned to the central kitchen for washing.”

Grant says: “The highlight of DMH’s design is the flow of the kitchen, and how the product enters and leaves the building as we are a high capacity kitchen. It is a thrill to see the kitchen in full operation. The central kitchen has the most beautiful fruit and vegetable washing, processing and packaging area. It is fabulous and

gives us the ability to use farm-to-school produce to the maximum.

I am proud of our employees’ enthusiasm to learn and use the new equipment. Our bakery is producing delicious homemade muffins to the delight of our students and staff.”

The right choice of equipment for the central kitchen was important to ensure a smooth-running production flow.

Altogether the kitchen equipment cost >

Equipment includes speciality kettles for pasta that require a crane with a one-ton hoist to lift the pasta out

\$3.5m. One of the key pieces, according to Dieli, is a combination cook and chill tank. At night, this equipment slow cooks heavy-muscle meats, such as turkey, ham and red meats, at a low temperature.

When the meats reach the desired cooking temperature, the equipment goes into chilling mode, rapidly cooling the water to bring the temperature of the meat down to the prescribed HACCP temperature control point.

Other equipment in the kitchen includes kettles with 100-200 gallon capacity and removable mixing blades; speciality kettles for pasta that require a crane with a one-ton hoist to lift the pasta out; three self-cooking combi ovens, four

convection ovens; a spiral mixer, a revolving rack oven for the bakery, and a pizza conveyor oven.

The custom flooring features several layers, including concrete for the top – or wear – surface, reinforced by steel bars so forklift trucks can run across it without damaging it. “We needed to protect the slab from temperature variations, keeping it cold so there’s no energy loss,” explains Dieli.

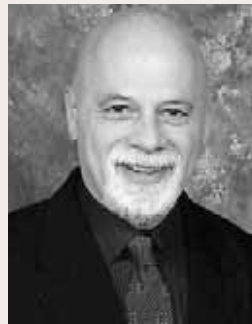
Currently, the central kitchen, which opened last year, produces 15-20,000 meals a day, although it has been designed for up to 30,000 meals a day. Dieli says, “Central kitchens can take two to three years to hit full production capabilities.”



Della S Lindley Elementary School sample lunch menu

- Pepperoni pizza
- Cheese and muffins
- Turkey ham and cheese sandwich
- Hot dog on a bun
- Corn
- Carrots
- Fresh apple, banana, orange
- Fruity Jell-O
- Trail mix
- Fat-free chocolate milk

With this project, DMH has demonstrated the importance of thorough research to understand the needs of Palm Springs district’s school meals service. Through its kitchen design and equipment specification, the company has created an effective central kitchen not only for the present and immediate future, but one that can be adapted in years to come. ■



Biography

Richard Dieli has over 30 years’ experience in foodservice design. Prior to establishing DMH, he spent 15 years in foodservice culinary operations and management. At DMH, he works on a variety of projects including schools, universities, hospitals, central kitchens and food courts.

Pahrump Valley Culinary School

After DMH Foodservice Design developed a brand new \$1m kitchen for Pahrump Valley High School’s culinary school in Nye County, Nevada, the number of students interested in enrolling in culinary courses increased by 200%. It’s easy to see why – the kitchen is new and gleaming, with all the latest equipment.

“The idea is to encourage kids to cook at an early age,” says Dieli. “The aim of the culinary school is to equip youngsters with the skills to get them into the advanced programme at Cornell University or Johnson & Wales University and with enough know-how to go straight into a restaurant or hotel. They will have the knowledge and skills to apply for a job.”

Working with SH Architecture, DMH Foodservice Design’s goal

was to identify the various skills the programme’s students needed to learn, including knife skills, hygiene and the ability to cook a variety of foods, from rice to seafood, steak and sauces. DMH also needed to calculate how many stations were needed and the location of an instructor’s counter.

“We worked with the school on the curriculum and our job was to define how the curriculum could be implemented in the cooking equipment,” adds Dieli. The cooking facility had to accommodate an average of 30 students, “so we had to provide adequate space for them to be able to work efficiently.”

Dieli and team designed eight cooking stations to accommodate 16 students and one teacher supervisor, as well as several other cooking stations with various equipment

such as kettle braising pans and combi ovens. The students’ cooking stations feature a circular, custom-cooking suite, complete with braising pans and steamers.

“We want students to be trained on great pieces of equipment so when they go to work, in a hospital kitchen or restaurant, they will recognise the equipment,” says Dieli.

A new type of servery, designed by DMH Foodservice Design, was the centrepiece of the renovated \$500,000 kitchen, as it speeds up transaction time. “Our objective was to make the kitchen self-sufficient and profitable, so you have to design the servery so the students can get through faster.”

Mark McGinty from SH Architecture says: “Both kitchens are state-of-the-art for their intended uses, exceeded the programme requirements and accounted for growth while staying within budget.”

The food counter features a multi-option display, which highlights the food item so students can easily see the choices. The number of point of sale (POS) stations have been increased and all students need to do is swipe their ID smart card for an automatic payment.

“We also introduced hot and cold carts for grab ‘n’ go products, which are constantly replenished,” says McGinty. “This reduces the line of students waiting.”

He adds: “DMH worked tirelessly with the kitchen staff and trained them to use the commercial equipment. DMH also identified the work flow of the product, from the freezer to the serving line, and identified and changed the serving and queuing lines for the students.”

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