



MIT Dining's Flagship

When the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge launched its first comprehensive board plan, it wanted to open a flagship meal plan operation at the same time.

That operation is The Howard Dining Hall in Maseeh Hall, one of five board operations on campus. "The institute will go through and target buildings for complete renovations, and that was one that was targeted several years ago," said Michael Myers, assistant director of MIT Dining. "They completely gutted the entire building to make more room for residential use. With that building being done, it was also determined that it would be fantastic to house our flagship meal plan operation."

Prior to the renovation, Maseeh Hall only served as residential housing with no foodservice operations. "This was a very historical building on campus and throughout the renovation process through the entire building, MIT and the whole team did a fantastic job in preserving the historical, classical look and feel of the building," he said. "It is a good mixture of modern and classical architecture, and it is still a very warm and inviting facility."

The school partnered with its dining partner for its comprehensive meal plan, Bon Appetit, and foodservice consultant Boston Showcase to design the concepts in the new facility. "From our perspective, we wanted to make sure that we had flexibility in the serving area," he said. "We worked in partnership with our dining partners to develop specific concepts that will be located in each location. In this particular concept, you've got the grill area, but we had several other areas that we wanted to remain as flexible as possible so as time and need arose, we could rotate different concepts in order to create new concept space on the consumer demand."

The Howard Dining Hall houses the school's first kosher serving area. "We are very committed and dedicated to our kosher program and expanding the program to the MIT community," said Myers. "Given that this is our flagship location, we also felt that this would be the proper location for the kosher service. The kosher food is prepared in another facility across the street and transferred over in each meal period."

In addition to the kosher serving area, the facility has a number of other stations. "We have a very large grill area that is set up to be able to serve vegetar-



ian, vegan and regular protein grill items,” he said. “We have a self-service salad and soup bar.”

A station for expo cooking was also created. “We have a spot for expo cooking in which we can rotate different concepts through — either carved meats, induction cooking, stir-fry concepts or a Mongolian grill-type concept,” said Myers. “The expo concept provides a lot of excitement for the students. They love to see their food cooked right in front of them. It helps the perception of quality and freshness and value as variables to determine exactly what it is they want to put in their meal.”

The facility features a very large production kitchen on its lower floor. “We have a very large production kitchen downstairs in the basement where most of the actual production and prep is being taken care of,” he said. “Food is then transported upstairs into the serving area where we do have a full line of equipment. We don’t have adequate refrigeration on the serving area, so much of that storage and prep area has to occur downstairs and then the food is transported upstairs. We do have full capability of doing scratch cooking that Bon Appetit is famous for in the upstairs area.”

Howard also features a deli station, comfort food station, desserts and Taj, a Bon Appetit Indian concept.

When *On-Campus Hospitality* previewed the launch of the house-dining program in the September 2011 issue, a main element was the addition of breakfast on campus. “For breakfast, we do your traditional breakfast, so scrambled eggs, oven-roasted potatoes, bacon, hash browns,” said Myers. “During the weekends, we also do brunch, where we will do an omelet station. We also have pancakes and French toast and pretty much any type of breakfast item, in addition to continental-style breakfasts where we offer six different types of cereals and fruit options.”

He is very pleased with how students have taken to the breakfast program. “In terms of breakfast, we are very surprised at the high usage of breakfast. It is much higher than we anticipated, which I think is fantastic because breakfast is one of the most important meals of the day. We feel very strongly that they need a good, solid breakfast in order to start their day off right.”

One of the goals of the house-dining program was to provide a means of building community. “It definitely has,” said Myers. “In the five buildings that these operations are in, we definitely have seen the opportunity for students to engage each other in casual conversations — give them the opportunity to take the few-minute break that they need from their serious academic schedules.”

The design of the facility had that community building in mind. “We have a private dining room that will hold approximately 65 people, which is available for student groups who reside primarily in that building, but we also keep it open to other student groups in the meal plan program,” he said. “It provides a great opportunity for students to get together with their peers or faculty and staff to discuss various issues related to their house.”

The two dining rooms in the facility, which seat approximately 150 individuals each, feature several long tables, seating up to 16 individuals. “We do have some other very large round tables that are pushed



back in the corners of the locations to provide a little bit of privacy for groups, that can hold up to 10-12 individuals,” said Myers. “One of our dining rooms has absolutely fantastic views of the Charles River and Boston skyline. That has proven to be a favorite of students.”

Students enjoy the new facility. “They really do enjoy the space,” he said. “They enjoy the food that Bon Appetit is producing for them. It has been a very positive reaction from them overall.”

—OCH

