

## TOMORROW'S COMPACT KITCHEN AT WORK: TURNKEY PREP/SERVERY UNIT OPENS AT OHIO U.

**S**teve Moore, Business Enterprise Specialist for the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired, a state agency based in Zainesville, OH, operating under the Business Enterprise Program, is constantly on the lookout for ways to make foodservice locations more user-friendly for the visually impaired individuals who run operations in Federal or state buildings.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that existing foodservice sites in government buildings are often no more than "a hole in the wall with little room for full-size equipment," he says.

Recently, Moore invested in the Diner-Mite Food Service System from Toska, a state-of-art turnkey food prep and serving facility that fits into just 120 sq. ft. of space and requires only one operator. The unit has been installed at Ohio Univ.

Caria McCune, a visually impaired operator, is in charge of providing foodservice for the 1,200 to 1,700 students at the rural branch campus location.

**Ergonomics at work:** Like all participants in the Business Enterprise Program, McCune is an independent licensed operator who hires her own employees, but depends upon the government – since it's a government contract – to provide the equipment.

She is routinely assisted by her husband Mike, and Ruth, a full-time employee, but because of the ergonomic design of the modular unit, plus some additional features engineered for the blind, McCune can handle the work herself if necessary.

"We have a standard unit which is really underutilized at this location, but I like the system because operations in government buildings are moved around a lot, so modularity and portability are important. If we had to, we could move the entire kitchen and reassemble it in two days," according to Moore.

"At this site, with competitive fast food and family restaurants nearby, there was only a closet with a hole cut in it for foodservice. Now we have a cook/hold oven (no exhaust hood is needed), two microwaves, a small oven for the preparation of scoop and bake dinner

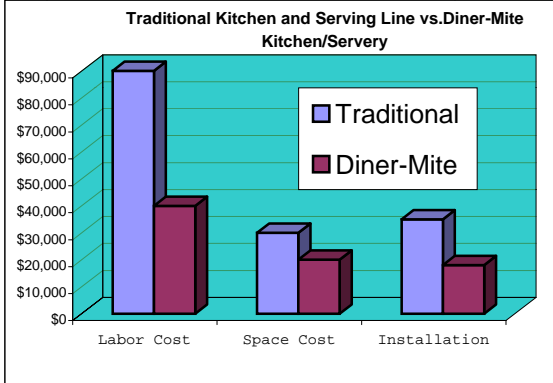
rolls, breads and pies, refrigerator/freezer, warewasher, etc. All appliances are part of a very organized system, so a person with visual impairment can learn their way around real fast," Moore says.

**Cashless transactions:** The system includes an automated touch screen (for ordering) tied to a bill changer, so there's no need for the operator to handle cash. The customer simply puts a \$5 bill, for example, and gets change.

"Plus, it's been adapted for Braille – and it talks. We put a speaker on the system, so that once customer pays for the order, the machine sorts by category and 'speaks' at the counter, telling our folks what the order is.

We also have a printer in there, so if a sighted person is on, they can look at the printed version," he explains.

Vending, located just five feet away, is stocked with national brand soft drinks, chips and candy, as well as sandwiches and baked-on-site pies prepared by McCune.



To fit the standard system to her specific needs, the manufacturer helped to locate adaptive aids including: (1) liquid level sensors for cup measurement, (2) talking thermometers, and (3) knives with guides for cutting slices of a prime rib, for example, all to the same thickness.

**More bells and whistles:** By next fall, Moore also expects to be overseeing foodservice at the larger St. Clairesville campus of Ohio U. It's a busier location that will host intramural sports, midnight basketball, etc.

"We'll be in the gymnasium facility which is still under construction. Then, we'll be the sole provider of food and vending at both locations. We bought another Diner-Mire unit, one with more bells and whistles, for the new site. Right now we have the standard unit with the deli component and we've purchased a similar unit with options which allow us to change the

scheme of the menu. "We could have a deli unit or take-out – since it's on wheels – and roll in a steamtable unit for hot entrees."

According to Sue Guenther – a 28 year – veteran of foodservice who most recently served as f/s manager at Wisconsin Electric Power Co. in Milwaukee – the slimline Diner-Mite provides an entirely new way to prepare and serve the customer into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Downsize options:** "It's especially suited to the downsized operations in

B&I, colleges and hospitals, since the serving line is collapsed into one kitchen servery unit," she points out.

As director of sales and marketing for the manufacturer, Toska Foodservice Systems, Inc., Guenther notes that the system can ideally serve 650 employees or less and provides a cost-effective alternative to a vending bank, with just one or two people doing all the ordering, preparation, serving and cleanup – all in a cashless system operating on a prepaid debit card.

"The standard unit doesn't need venting, but at Abbott Labs in Chicago, IL, one of our units serves about 200 employees at a remote site. It also has a griddle and fryer, because they wanted to do a lot of exhibition cooking. The also do a lot of pasta and it works."

**Compact space:** Overall, the collapsible kitchen takes up approx. 300sq. ft. vs. 3,000 for most kitchens, and only requires electrical and plumbing access from the facility. Best of all, Guenther says, the cost is approx. one-third that of a commercial kitchen.

by Karen Weisberg