

Anixter's f/s upgrade means productivity & profits

Anixter International Inc. in Glenview, IL, a Fortune 500 company and the leading global distributor of wire, cable, communications connectivity products and "C" Class inventory components, is using a specially designed modular kitchen to save space, build employee participation and productivity, and cut labor cost in half at its new headquarters.

The newly constructed world headquarters is home to 600 Anixter employees. The cafeteria operation debuted in April. A tenant in its previous location, Anixter had no hand in running the f/s operation.

The new dining room has 100 seats, with 30 more in an outside patio area. Breakfast and lunch are served between the hours of 7 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. Sales should eventually average about \$900 per day, says Mary Ellen Rucks, corp. facility mgr. For Anixter and the firm's liaison to f/s contractor Eurest.

The goal of Anixter's f/s program is to keep its employees in the building and lunch hours to 60 min., thereby boosting productivity. The cafeteria is subsidized. Say Rucks: "We tried to reduce the prices a fair amount."

"Everything is priced at \$2.99, \$3.99, or \$4.99, and that always includes a drink." The average per person check at lunch is about \$3.60.

The cafeteria took on even greater significance recently, since Anixter has "cut back on catering tremendously," according to Rucks. "But we definitely want to keep the sales inhouse; we don't want them going to someone else to do these things."

Efficient kitchen: The firm's new home features a modular turnkey kitchen and serving line. The design offers benefits such as:

- Reduced operation costs (by more than 70%) through compact, ergonomic design. The set-up can measure as little as 120 sq. ft. without seating.

It also features complete solid-surface counters and laminated fronts, plus beverage counters and a separate salad bar. **Esthetics & efficiency:** "The installation was quick and the esthetics of it, the look, is just beautiful," says Rucks. "It's basically seamless." It was veteran foodservice consultant George Zawacki, Senior Associate with consulting firm Cini-Little International, who suggested going with the modular kitchen.



Anixter's new modular turnkey kitchen reduces labor costs and boosts volume.

- The ability to eliminate cashier lines by automating ordering and payments. The Automated Cashier Terminal (ACT) allows guests to order and pay by themselves using a touch-screen point-of-sale terminal and debit card.

- The kitchens are pre-wired for a one-point electrical connection, reducing connection and installation costs. In fact, installation takes just three days in smaller footprints, or three to six days for larger versions.

The strategy has worked well. Only 20% of its employees were using the cafeteria in its former digs. In the new facility, participation has zoomed to 70%, or 400 to 450 meals during a one-hour lunch.

The March 2003 installation measures just 22 linear feet and includes a combination walk-in refrigerator/freezer, storage rooms, a pair of ovens, deep fryer, standard and panini grills as part of a ventless systems and an induction cooker.

says Eurest chef/mgr. Britan Cooney. "Everything is within hand's reach, so there is less foot traffic; less crowding and bumping into each other. Big kitchens, big steps. Small kitchens, small steps." Cooney reports to district mgr. Mike Niersbach, who reports in turn to Rucks.

Additional economies have resulted from the use of the ventless set-up. As Rucks explains, "We've saved a chunk of money, not having to put black iron in. We just have five filters that we have to change at certain intervals."

"We have some pretty high-tech equipment that requires less cook time," says Cooney, referring to a combination

convection/microwave oven. A pair of wall-mounted microwaves are "within an arm's reach of two cooks. We also have a flat-top clamshell grill that cuts cooking

time in half. Anixter's input into the actual design of the kitchen was minimal. Says Rucks: "People like the soups here, and they only had one well for soup. I said, 'No, we have to have at least two.'" The salad bar was a little too small to begin with, so they expanded it."

The kitchen is staffed by five Eurest employees – a savings of two or three positions thanks to the kitchen design, says Rucks. It includes a prep area in the back, with the battery and serving wells out front.

Money-free: The cashless system allows Anixter employees to order food on screen from a remote terminal using a preloaded card. The employees add money to the card as they go, either by using cash, a credit card or payroll reduction. The system eliminates the cashier station and the need for a full-time employee to handle money.

By Howard Riell

Café Anixter menu sampler

- Au Bon Pain Soups
- Market Carvery (Weight Watchers items)
- Roast Pork Loin with Garlic Roasted Potatoes
- Carved to Order Roast Sirloin of Beef with Potato
- Grecian Chicken with Roasted Potato
- Herb-Crusted Chicken Breast with Vegetable Rice Pilaf
- Chicken Breast Cordon Bleu
- Sandwich Central
- BLT Wrap
- Cajun Chicken Breast Salad
- Chicken or Tuna Waldorf Salad
- Stuffed Baked Potato
- Tuna Swiss Wrap
- Fresh Grill
- BBQ Sandwich
- Grilled Ham and Cheese Sandwich

The cost of installation was about \$13,000 – just 25% of the cost of a conventional kitchen. It was built by Lannon, WI-based Toska Foodservice Systems Inc., which worked with Cini-Little.

"It's efficient; it requires fewer cooks,"