

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

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An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



Barbara Haskell

**Foodservice Director, Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, Blue Hill, ME
By Foodservice East**

Barbara Haskell grew up in a family that served the nearly 90-year-old Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, a 25-bed critical care facility in Blue Hill, ME for two generations. She didn't expect to follow suit, but wound up taking a kitchen post after completing culinary school and a semester abroad in Ireland. She'd worked in restaurants, delis and a retirement community but never healthcare. Today she serves a rural community of family, friends, community and neighbors. "There's a little extra love and pride put in the services that we provide here."

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SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: You are literally changing the image of hospital food – what type of feedback do you get from customers and patients?

HASKELL: Hospital food used to have quite a reputation, not in a good way. It's nice to see smiling, occasionally puzzled faces when they ask "this is hospital food? But it looks and tastes so good!" We are changing patient's expectations of their foodservice experience during their care. They don't expect to get delicious, well-prepared and garnished restaurant quality meals. The days of gray meat drowned in gravy are over. These days, fresh, flavorful and colorful meals should be expected. We get comments from patients saying they're disappointed because they are being discharged before a meal they were really looking forward to, or that they don't want to leave because the food was so good. It makes all of the hard work worth it.

FSE: What's most exciting about what you do?

HASKELL: I'm most excited about being given the unique opportunity to impact our patient's care. For many patients, meals are the best part of their day. I have witnessed food literally fuel the healing process, strengthen bodies and lift spirits. Patients are at their most vulnerable and weakest time. They appreciate and recognize the effort put in their meals.

FSE: How did you come to focus purchasing on fresh, local, organic foods?

HASKELL: Around five years ago we started to see a shift in our patient and customer demands. It was time to move away from the frozen, prepared items and get back to basic scratch cooking with top quality ingredients. It's important to be aware of where your food is coming from and how long it has to travel to get to you. With an increasing number of food allergies, it's also important to know exactly what's in the food you are preparing. Although we have a limited growing season here in Maine, we are able to source many items throughout the year. For example we purchase local, no-spray blueberries from Dan-a-Dew Farms year round. We use them fresh during the season, frozen in the off-season and the best part is the berries are grown just a few miles from our hospital.

We have worked with many local purveyors over the past seven years. We are fortunate to have an extraordinary relationship with one local farmer in particular. We have been working with Quentin Young at Young's Farm in Sedgwick, Maine for the past four years. Together we have built a foundation for sourcing local, organically grown produce efficiently and affordably. During peak season we receive two orders per week of fresh, flavorful, nutritious produce from Quentin's land, which is located seven miles from our facility. He is meticulous about the quality and taste of his produce and provides it at a fair price. He is able to focus on vegetables we are committed to purchasing. Throughout the growing season we stay in contact so he can communicate the farm's progress and I can write our menus according to what becomes available. He

harvests, washes and delivers most often within 12-18 hours of my order. We feel lucky to have this available to us. It's an arrangement that "just works".

FSE: What is the 'secret' of your success?

HASKELL: It's not really a secret at all... Success comes from hard work, dedication, respect, appreciation and love. My parents have led by example and have always been an inspiration. Success is in perpetual motion. I haven't achieved it; it's a long journey that I've just begun.

FSE: What are some of the projects you plan for next year in your hospital foodservice?

HASKELL: Future projects that we are looking forward to are sourcing grass-fed beef, free-range organic chicken, antibiotic & hormone free pork and local sustainable seafood. We also look forward to expanding and improving our catering program. We would like to update our cafeteria facilities to better meet the needs of our customers and give a more modern look. We look forward to continuing our commitment to the environment and health of the community we serve.

FSE: What led you into compostable disposables? Do patients/customers notice and if so, what's the reaction?

HASKELL: I attended the FoodMed 2007 conference in Boston sponsored by Health Care Without Harm with our dietitian and then foodservice director, Martha Cole and we decided to phase out use of polystyrene foam as one of our first steps toward our commitment to sustainable foodservice. We strongly encourage using reusable plates, bowls and mugs in our cafeteria however we do provide compostable disposables for our customers as well. We currently use bamboo and sugar cane based containers and plates along with occasional use of plant based plastic containers. We do get comments about them, many appreciate that they are microwave safe and biodegradable. Others comment that they don't hold up quite as well with saucy or wet meals. Despite being notably more expensive than their predecessor foam, it was overall a very positive change.

FSE: Do you see a growing movement toward healthier foods, sustainability and more eco-conscious actions?

HASKELL: There is a growing movement for sure. I feel healthcare has an added responsibility to lead by example by means of providing healthy, sustainable food service. How can a dietitian or provider advise our patients to eat healthier but then go to our cafeteria and not have healthy foods choices available? Our job in a hospital is to promote health. Fresh, local, organic, sustainable food is the foundation on which health is built. It's a win-win model, good for us and better for the environment. With the growing healthcare crisis, it's an issue that can no longer be ignored.