

Secrets of Success

an online exclusive from Foodservice East

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



Diane Imrie, M.B.A., R.D., director of nutrition services at Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington, VT, has been involved with efforts to make healthcare foodservice healthier and “greener” for several years now. A planning session entitled ‘Fit & Healthy Vermonters – Preventing Obesity in Vermont,’ led her to implement a Nutrition Plan and make “major changes in the dining areas.” At the same time, Fletcher Allen was beginning to look into the sustainability of its food supply.

FSE: When did Fletcher Allen decide to become involved in so many "green" initiatives and when did your department get involved?

IMRIE: We started focusing on this almost two years ago, but really ramped it up and became more focused after we signed the Healthy Food in Health Care pledge in April of 2006. Truly, our Nutrition Plan and the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge went hand in hand in terms of being the right thing to do for our patients, employees and community.

FSE: It's my impression that you "went green" before many other hospital foodservice departments. As a trendsetter, what were the biggest challenges?

IMRIE: We have struggled with access to the products that we want. Some of the local vendors and farms just don't have enough supply available for us, and the major vendors weren't carrying the products we wanted to bring in. I think that both areas are improving.

FSE: How did you get into food and nutrition in the first place?

IMRIE: I am a Registered Dietitian by profession (I graduated from McGill University, and food is a hobby and passion for me.

FSE: What suggestions would you give someone just starting to "go green"?

IMRIE: Start wherever you are most interested, and look for some small successes to get your employees and customers excited about change. Then move onto the tougher challenges.

FSE: What are some of the things you've done that you're most proud of?

IMRIE: I'd say the relationships that we are building with our local farmers, and the excitement that our customers express regarding our green changes. People regularly stop me in the hall to congratulate our department on the work that we are putting into this, and on our successes so far. The organization felt strongly enough about our program to advertise what we are doing in the newspaper.

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

IMRIE: Be passionate about what you do, and don't miss an opportunity to educate others about what you are doing.

FSE: What's been the biggest challenge?

IMRIE: The biggest challenge is the time required to research new products and build new relationships with vendors. We approach this as a team and each of the managers are working on different projects, all related to the Pledge and sustainability. Everyone is interested and committed to making changes, so it makes it easier to have accomplishments in lots of different areas.

FSE: What new initiatives will you be introducing in the months ahead, if any?

IMRIE: We are currently analyzing our fish purchases, to see how sustainable they are and what changes we need to make if any. We hope to be composting all of our plates in the coming months as well, which will divert a lot of trash from the landfill.

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