

# Equipment and Construction Connection

## **PART I** **Kitchen / Cafeteria** **Renovation:** **Getting Started**

By Linda S. Roth

Published: FOCUS ON SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE: New York School Nutrition Association, Volume 58, Number 2, Spring 2009

We are in the midst of new, exciting and yet uncertain times. There is a hope for positive change to our government's leadership, but how will these changes affect the current economy and uncertainty of State and Federal funding? How will the economy affect our business and foodservice operations? At this point we do not know the answers, but there is encouragement that new leadership will bring new long range solutions and ease our current economic problems.

I have heard from many of the Directors that School Foodservice programs have felt the pinch of the economy this year. Food purchasing, transportation costs, product changes and NY and USDA guidelines have all affected your bottom line. Equipment purchases and repairs that are long overdue may be placed on the back burner for another year.

Yet there is hope, business trainers are telling us that this is the time to be innovative in our organization's approach to problems, to teach and strengthen employees, to be creative and change some of our daily work habits. Our goals need to be set beyond this coming year. We need to position our organization and be ready for the growth that will come in the near future.

Being ready for that growth does directly translate to your foodservice equipment and physical kitchen operations. Therefore, over a number of FOCUS issues I would like to explore the possibilities of kitchen and serverly remodel projects, innovative equipment changes and the construction process, how you could be affected if your district passes a construction referendum and how you can be proactive with equipment replacement should a major capital reconstruction project not be in your foreseeable future.

Let's start with the typical process behind a capital construction project and your role as the Foodservice Director and design team partner.

A capital construction project can be initiated in a number of ways.

1. You have heard through the grapevine that a construction referendum is being discussed. You, the Foodservice Director, have not been approached to be included in the project, yet here you are attempting to feed the students in an original 1960's kitchen.
2. Your Business Manager has just approached you and stated that the foodservice operation is part of a capital construction project, followed by "please put together a list of what you need" for your operation. Oh Boy!!!
3. You, the Foodservice Director, helped to initiate a capital construction project. You have met with the District's Superintendent or Business Manager and talked about major changes to your operation.

Scenarios one and two are cause for conversation with the district's Superintendent or Business Manager. If you have heard about a possible referendum, please find out who has been delegated project point person and

# Equipment and Construction Connection

initiate a conversation. Communicate how you would like to be a part of the program. Attempt to get involved on the ground floor. If you have been approached to “put together a list,” find out what they are really asking. Do they just want a list of replacement equipment or is an entire rebuild in the picture? Can you think big and get that new kitchen and serving area you have been dreaming about? Starting the conversation may get you farther than you think.

The third scenario places you and the foodservice operation in a good position. You have the ear of the Superintendent or Business Manager and can move forward in formulating a program to update the operation. A well thought-out needs outline would validate your intentions. Your initial program may include equipment replacement, student service ideas, safety issues and bottom line costs. Talking to colleagues, visiting other operations and thinking outside your four walls will help to solidify your ideas.

All of the above options require input and direction from the Foodservice Department. Work with your trusted staff for a full picture of your current operation. Note parts of the operation that work well and should not be changed; then ask what does not work and requires change. Brainstorm; ask questions that start with “What If?” You may not know what path the project will take but a full understanding of the current issues and the future needs will be a solid foundation as the project moves into design.

Next, understand the parties involved in the design and planning of the project. There are three main parties involved in any renovation project: First is the Owner, in this case the School District and their representatives (including the Foodservice Department,) second is the

Architectural Design Team and third is the General Contractor. Hopefully you have already established a relationship with the District’s point person and that line of communication has been opened.

The Architectural Design Team is comprised of a number of specialists that add their information for a complete design document package. (Design Documents will be covered at a later date.) Design Teams normally consist of the Architect who sub-contracts to Electrical, Plumbing and Mechanical Engineers, Landscape, Interior and Foodservice Designers. What specialist is called to work on the project is dependent on the needs of the project. It should be noted that interaction between team members is critical for a complete project.

There are a number of Foodservice Design Consultants in New York State and although we have different styles of communication, we all have the best intentions to create a successful foodservice operation for you. Our goal is to turn your dreams and needs into physical reality. As designers, we are hired to bridge the gap between your operational knowledge and the world of construction. This is not always a simple undertaking. Our biggest constraints deal with the physical building space allocated to the foodservice operation and amount of money budgeted for the purchase of equipment. Both of these issues directly affect your operation. Therefore, having you (the Foodservice expert of **your** operation) work with us in the initial stages of design is critical. Although there is a Foodservice Designer on the project, the time that you spend during the initial design process is almost always reflected in the overall success of the project.

At this point I need to issue a warning. Anytime an Architect or Foodservice

# Equipment and Construction Connection

Designer walks in a kitchen there will be disruptions. Some may be small and others may test your creative abilities to continue operating. Always keep the end picture in sight. All of your hard work and time will pay off when the first student walks in and is amazed at what has transpired.

In the next issue we will begin to explore the design process.