

Infusing New Life into Garrett Community Center at Tel Hai, Honey Brook, Penn.

Meeting the changing and sophisticated expectations of residents, staff and visitors, a renovation of the Garrett Community Center introduced an open kitchen serving three dining venues and significantly improved the dining experience.

By **Donna Boss**, Contributing Editor

Located in the countryside of Chester County in southeastern Pennsylvania, continuing care retirement community Tel Hai offers independent residences, personal care and skilled nursing care.

Established in 1956, Tel Hai (Hebrew for “hill of life”) is home to more than 500 people in residential cottages and apartments, as well as Lakeview at Tel Hai’s personal care and the Meadows at Tel Hai’s nursing services. Tel Hai’s Adult Day Services center provides daily supervision and structured programming; the Children’s Learning Garden, a Hildebrandt Learning Center, provides a licensed preschool program, before- and after-school programs and a summer camp on-site.

“In response to the growth of the independent living population, we realized that renovating the community center was needed to give the growing independent population here more amenities,” says Bruce Hartshorne, CASP, executive vice president of operations. “These amenities include dining options that offer menu and seating options to meet the changing expectations of residents.”

In 1996 and 1997, the facility expanded to include a community center to serve independent residents. “We had a dining room upstairs that offered one meal a day, and the café downstairs also offered one meal a day,” Hartshorne says. “We wanted to update our dining and realized that our meal equivalency plan, in which residents had one meal a day, wasn’t working. So, in 2008, Chris [Chris Anthony, AOS, CDM, CFPP, director of dining and nutritional services] and I developed a dining dollars program and went with menu pricing à la carte-style so residents can buy full meals or just soup, sandwiches and smaller meals throughout the day.”

In 2012, a renovation of the community center transformed the dining facilities and enhanced the quality of services provided to guests. “Before the renovation, the space was one big kitchen,” says the project’s kitchen designer, Dan Pierson of JEM Associates. “The walls were torn down, and an entirely new kitchen was installed. The back of the house was minimized to give more space to the preparation up front and to the café.”

Today, residents, staff and visitors may eat on the second floor at the casual dining Garden Café, in the Azalea dining room with waiter service and in the Magnolia room, also with waiter service, and a more upscale menu than the others. On the ground floor, customers may purchase food and beverages at the coffee shop.

“We need to stay ahead of the trends for senior dining,” Anthony says. “Boomers are coming, and they’ll be very sophisticated in their tastes and service expectations. For all the residents, we have to find a balance between offering old-style, traditional foods and more contemporary menu items.”

“The primary challenges were working ‘inside the box’ to create better functioning and more appealing, diverse dining venues that reflect customer expectations,” says Abigail Stewart, interior designer at RLPS.

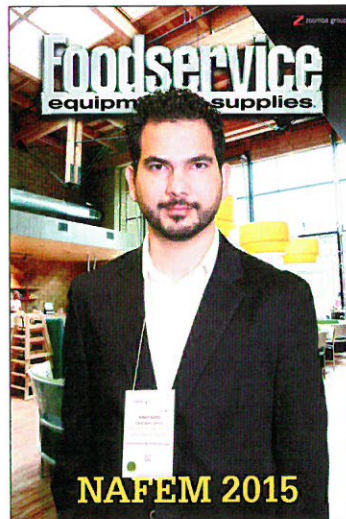
On the second floor, architects and designers used shoji-style movable partition walls with translucent glass to help distinguish areas while providing flexibility to respond to varying space needs. “Accomplishing the extensive updates required carefully phased renovations to the dining areas in sections and setting up a temporary warming station for food prepared in the health center production kitchen when the community center kitchen was being renovated,” Stewart says.

To select their food, Garden Café customers walk along a service line so they can see several menu items presented in hot and cold wells. Quartz countertops with high heat resistance, along with ceramic tile in areas with heat lamps, offer a clean, upscale ambiance. The front faces of the serving lines contain metal panel inserts for aesthetic interest and durability in order to hold up against regular contact with canes, walkers and other mobility devices. Tile backsplashes add interest and provide easy maintenance. Decorative accent pendant lights with shatter-proof lightbulbs also contribute to the ambiance.

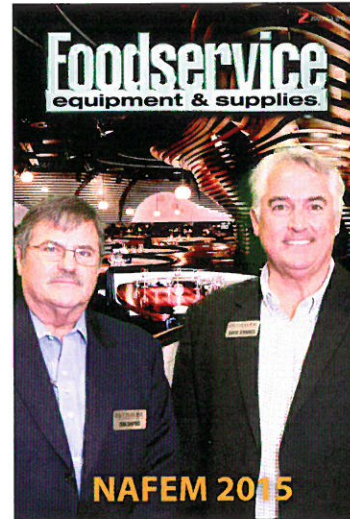
While viewing the cooking action, customers enter Garden Café, place their orders and then walk to the dining area to find a seat. When orders are complete, a staff member calls out the customer’s name and asks him or her to pick up the order.



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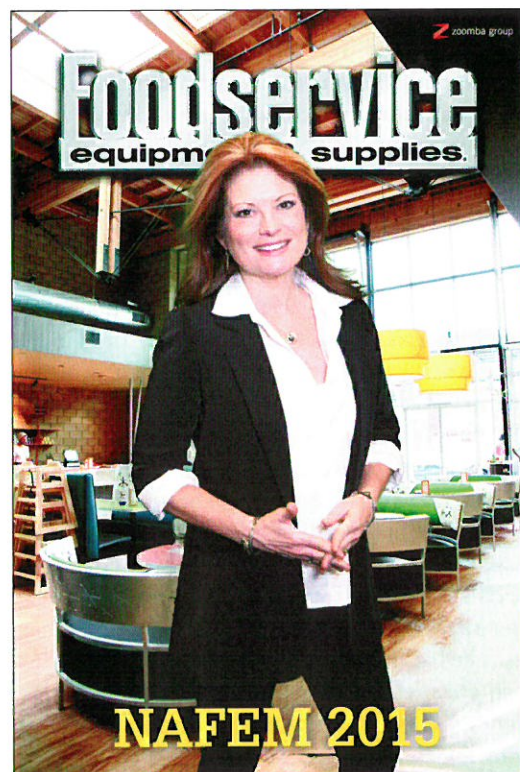
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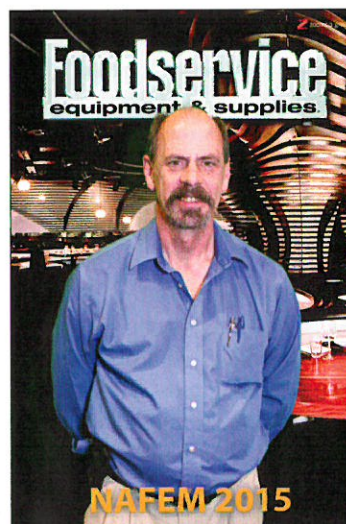
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AAA Bar & Restaurant Supply



Lisa Schmitz
Loyet Creative



Juergen Friese
University of Colorado



John Dunne
Ettinger-Rosini & Associates



Top: Customers placing orders have a full view of the cooking suite. The design features stone and quartz countertops.

Middle Left: The cooking suite contains grills, fryers and ranges distributed on each side so staff can prepare meals here for the various dining locations.

Photographs courtesy of JEM Associates; photography by Dan Pierson

Middle Right: Another serving line offers customers a view of the pizza oven, sandwich and salad prep and refrigerated cases. Tile backsplashes add interest and provide easy maintenance.

Photograph courtesy of RLP5 Architects; photography by Larry Lefever Photography

Right: Seating is close to the food preparation so guests feel like part of the eatertainment. Natural light brings cheer into the dining space. *Photograph courtesy of Tel Hai*



Flex your cooking muscle.

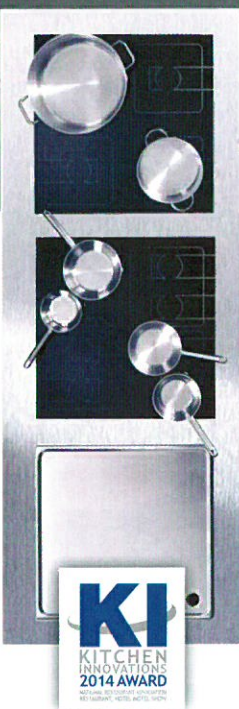
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Facts of Note

- **Opened:** September 2012
- **Scope of Project:** Complete renovation of the Garrett Community Center for independent living residents. On the first floor, renovations include The Daily Brew coffee shop and General Store. Second-floor renovations include The Garden Café with self-service and take-out in a bright, cheerful setting. The Azalea room offers waiter service, and the Magnolia room offers waiter service and an upscale menu.
- **Size:** Café, 2,100 sq. ft. including the 1,300-sq.-ft. kitchen and 800-sq.-ft. serving area; Azalea, 1,500 sq. ft.; Magnolia, 500 sq. ft. Coffee shop, 400 sq. ft.; servery at Lakeview, 500 sq. ft.
- **Seats:** 50 in Garden room; 74 in Azalea; 30 in Magnolia
- **Average Check:** \$5 in Garden; \$12 to \$13 in Azalea Square
- **Daily Customers:** 400 to 600 at Garden Café and Azalea
- **Hours:** The Garden Café: Monday through Saturday, breakfast from 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., lunch from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., dinner from 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday, 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Azalea Square: Monday through Friday, breakfast from 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., lunch from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., dinner from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, lunch from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m., dinner from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Sunday, breakfast and dinner options from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. Magnolia Room: formal dining by reservation only Thursday and Friday, from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and open for private parties.
- **Menu Specialties:** Fresh vegetables, omelets, quiche, acorn squash stuffed with quinoa and smoked mozzarella cheese over mixed greens, pizza, rotisserie chicken, salmon, beef tenderloin, rack of lamb, lobster, and crab cakes.
- **Staff:** 30 to 35 for foodservice
- **Total Project Cost:** \$3 million (whole community)
- **Equipment Investment:** \$1 million, including mechanical
- **Website:** www.telhai.org

For the dining area interior, designers reused the existing tables and chairs on both floors. “The chairs had recently been reupholstered, and both were in good condition,” Stewart says. New tables feature a wood-look top with an Acrylite finish for durability and ease of cleaning.

Food Delivery and Preparation

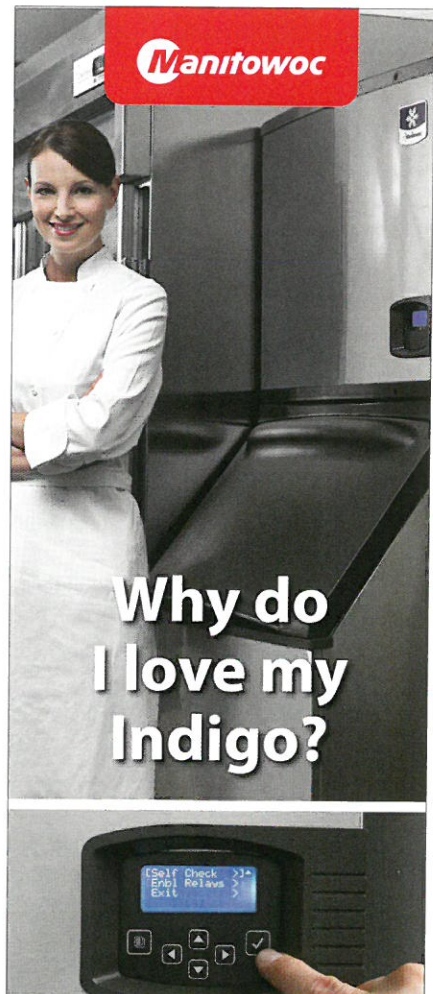
When food arrives at the back loading dock, a receiver checks in the food. Staff transport fresh produce to a walk-in refrigerator and frozen items to a freezer. Both sit outside the building. “There wasn’t enough space to put all the cold storage inside,” Anthony says. Inside the main kitchen, designated areas hold prepared foods and dry goods.

When production begins, the cook selects the necessary ingredients from the storage areas. Staff wash and cut fresh produce and prepare fresh meats as well as other mise en place for the menu. “The pot- and pan-cleaning area was designed to be adjacent to the prep area with sanitation in mind,” Anthony says. Anthony, a 1983 CIA graduate, worked at hotels, restaurants, the Pentagon and various businesses before coming to Tel Hai nearly 13 years ago.

In the main kitchen prep area, staff use a double-stacked convection oven to cook meat, cookies and desserts and use a tilting skillet to sear and braise meats or batch-cook menu items for catering events. Staff also use a six-burner range to make additional soups and stocks. They cook vegetables in a double-stacked steamer.

Fully visible to customers, the kitchen’s focal point is the cooking suite that allows staff to prepare food in one location for all three dining rooms and for catered events. “In my experience it is very rare to find a cooking suite in a retirement community dining venue,” Pierson says.

“One line faces the Garden Café, and the other, the Azalea dining room,” Anthony says. “Staff can work at multiple stations and send food out to either location as needed.”



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Key Players

- **Owner:** Tel Hai Retirement Community
- **President/CEO:** Joe Swartz
- **Executive Vice President, Operations:** Bruce A. Hartshorne, CASP
- **Director of Dining & Nutritional Services:** Chris Anthony, AOS, CDM, CFPP
- **Assistant Director of Dining & Nutritional Services:** Ted Koehle
- **Dining & Nutrition Service Dietitian:** Sybil Oswalt, RD, CSG, LDN
- **Dining Services Manager:** Dorothy Perry, CDM, CFPP
- **Dining Services Supervisor:** Carissa Steffy
- **Executive Chef:** David Bechta
- **Architect:** RLPS, Lancaster, Penn.; John Houck, AIA, project architect
- **Interior Design:** RLPS, Lancaster, Penn.; Abigail Stewart, interior designer
- **Foodservice Consultant:** JEM Associates, Egg Harbor Township, N.J.; John Egnor, president, and Dan Pierson, project manager
- **Equipment Dealer:** Clark Food Service, Lancaster, Penn.; Jeff Dahl, project manager
- **Construction:** Wohlsen Construction, Lancaster, Penn.; Dave Wanner, project manager

Staff work at the cooking suite to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner. On one side, staff use the range's six burners for sautéing peppers, mushrooms and steak for fajitas; poaching eggs; and preparing other menu ingredients for dishes served in Azalea and Magnolia dining rooms. An overhead broiler melts cheese and heats other ingredients.

Adjacent to this area, a three-foot griddle cooks menu ingredients including eggs, cheese, fajitas and bacon; a two-basket fryer cooks French fries and onion rings.

"The kitchen provides culinary flexibility," Anthony says. "This flexibility allows us to plan and prepare several events each month for residents and guests. For example, every Tuesday in the Garden Café, we have Ladies' Night. Once a month we have an upscale dining event, such as Mediterranean Night, Steak Night, Seafood Fest, and so forth."

This flexibility also allows staff to accommodate special dietary needs such as allergies. "We're very sensitive to allergies and use designated tools and utensils so we can keep ingredients and equipment separate to prepare what our guests require."

A few steps from the cooking suite, staff cook pizza, mac and cheese and casseroles in a gas-lit hearth oven; prepare sandwiches and assemble salads using a cold bain-marie; heat sandwiches on a panini grill; and roast chicken in a rotisserie oven. A carving station allows staff to add more theater to the meal preparation. An air screen protects food in the front display. Beverages and a take-out refrigerator sit adjacent to the cooking and assembly areas.

Top Right: The coffee shop offers customers coffee and tea, as well as cold items kept in an open-air-refrigerated display case.

Right: The open kitchen built in Meadows Health Care Center contains equipment including a griddle, fryer, charrigill, two-burner range, steam table and cold bain-marie for preparing made-to-order items.

Photographs courtesy of JEM Associates; photography by Dan Pierson



A Coffee Shop in the Community Center and an Open Kitchen in Lakeview

On the first level, The Daily Brew coffee shop offers a full array of coffee and tea beverages. This area contains coffee and hot-water heaters and dispensers as well as a refrigerated merchandiser holding grab-and-go items. Residents and guests can purchase food items such as milk, butter, eggs, ice cream, candy, toiletries, greeting cards and stamps from the General Store within The Daily Brew.

As Tel Hai has grown, so has the need for skilled care. To accommodate the growth of this population and to improve services, an open kitchen was built in Meadows Health Care Center containing equipment including a griddle, fryer, charrigill, two-burner range, steam table and cold bain-marie for preparing made-to-order items. The equipment supports staff preparation of restaurant-style meals for residents, guests and visitors. "The skilled care open kitchen has the firepower that most restaurants would die for," Pierson says.

Keeping up with food and dining trends will continue to be a top priority for Hartshorne and Anthony as they work to please their increasingly discerning customers. The community will continue to grow and expand. As the residents of Tel Hai live longer than previous generations, dining will be one of the amenities that continues to not only provide nourishment, but brighten their days as well. **FE&S**