

Serving Up Success

By Joanne M. Powell

In a partnership with Frisch's Restaurants, Inc., a food service program at an Ohio career center is helping students with learning disabilities transition from school to work.

The Greene County Career Center in Xenia, Ohio, has a food service program satisfying the appetites of visitors, students and staff, as well as meeting the training goals of students with developmental disabilities. In 1991, the food service program formed a successful partnership with Frisch's, a Cincinnati-based restaurant chain. The career center is just one of the many career-tech schools participating in Frisch's restaurant training program.

In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated formal transition planning for all students receiving special education services. Career and technical education became actively involved in assisting students with disabilities in education, job training and employment.

Frisch's, established in 1939, has a history of recruiting individuals with special needs, according to Michael Gilligan, recruiter for the chain.

"If people with disabilities need jobs, and we can provide jobs, and we can customize to the person working around

his or her disabilities, it makes good business sense," Gilligan says.

With this in mind, Frisch's restaurant training program was cited in an issue of *Restaurants and Institutions* as a model of how businesses can form partnerships with state rehabilitation agencies to increase the success rate of hiring those with disabilities. The success of this program has gained national attention for Frisch's.

The restaurant training program offers students with special needs the opportunity to train for careers in the restaurant industry, while helping to solve two of the biggest problems facing the vast restaurant business—the critical labor shortage and the high cost of training—while also placing those with disabilities in the workplace and off the Social Security system.

Opportunities for All

Recent changes have opened the Greene County Career Center's program to participation by any student interested in food service. Although the program



is open to the entire student population, the aim of the program is toward students with disabilities. The participants have always, and continue to be, those on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Their disabilities vary from physical to mental to emotional.

Before a student enters this program, a comprehensive vocational test is completed to determine his or her interest and skill area. Through the IEP process, interested students from any of the seven Greene County school districts determine their career goals and then may choose to enter into the food service program. Students enter the program in their sophomore year and may stay in the program for two to five years (or up to age 22), depending on their individual needs.

Students not only receive career skills in food service, but also applied academics and related and employability skills. If students successfully complete all required coursework and career training, they receive their passports containing their skills achieved, grades, attendance, career goals, vocational trade certificate and high school diploma.

Frisch's at the Greene County Career Center has continued to grow in popularity since its startup in 1991 under the previous instructor, Betty Hosta. Today, the food service program continues to be a successful operation under the present instructor, Joanne Powell. A limited Frisch's menu is served with a smile and at very reasonable prices. The program operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays during lunchtime, 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Food was originally purchased on a to-go basis or served restaurant style in the school's Greene Room. Instructors would bring their classes to Frisch's with advanced reservations, with the community also welcome to enjoy this Frisch's experience.

The Diner

As of spring 2004, the food service class moved into a new classroom and lab facility. The new facility includes an



The new lab facility includes The Diner, an eating area modeled after a fast-food restaurant.



eating area modeled after a fast-food restaurant known as The Diner. The new lab has state-of-the-art equipment, a computerized digital dining system and generous space, which all provide an excellent learning environment. The Diner is a great real-life work experience and a unique dining experience for students, staff and the community.

Last fall, several local school principals and counselors were invited to attend the program's grand opening. Since then, the program has been running smoothly and continues to be a hit with students and staff.

The restaurant training program also includes actual on-site training at a nearby Frisch's restaurant. On Wednesdays and Fridays, the teacher assistant transports four to six students to the restaurant. Students are assigned to work stations, where they perform the duties of the job. Generally, the students work directly with a Frisch's employee, receiving hands-on experience in that particular job station. The students rotate jobs every two weeks, allowing

them to learn the various restaurant positions.

Many times, this valuable experience allows the restaurant to become acquainted with each student and, at the same time, allows the student to become comfortable with the restaurant. This on-site training has created job opportunities with Frisch's for several food service students.

A System That Works

Each student begins the school year by receiving an extensive course in safety and sanitation. The program utilizes a variety of resources, including supplemental materials from Frisch's Restaurant, Inc. To assure that each student is safety minded and prepared to participate in the lab, he or she must pass a safety test.

In preparing the students for the world of work, it is important to create working systems that are similar to the actual food industry. As a result of several years of experience and knowledge in the food management industry,



Students rotate work stations at the restaurants so that they can learn various jobs.

the teacher became very acquainted with working systems and evaluating techniques. By implementing these techniques into a realistic lab situation, the students benefit when transferring to an actual workplace.

To assist both the employee (student) and employer (Frisch's), the successful working systems were implemented in the classroom lab environment. They include the following:

- proper training;
- job outlines available for employees (students) at all times;
- a working environment conducive and comfortable to complete the job;
- proper tools for the job; and
- appropriate and timely evaluations to assist employees.

Since the students are being trained to enter the workforce, the instructor modeled evaluation techniques such as “the business world” or similar real job situations.

Developmentally disabled students,

like young children, need small steps, routine and repetition. In order for the students to recall their job assignments, the instructor designed a sheet for the students to use as a reference; this is in case they forget their assigned areas. Lab assignments are made every two weeks. Each student's name is placed on the sheet, which is then posted in the lab area. If students forget, they are taught to refer to the sheet instead of asking the instructor or someone else. This teaches them how to assume responsibility. This behavior theory is referred to as shaping, using small steps combined with feedback to help learners reach their goals.

After each student has successfully passed his or her safety test, the instructions and/or training begins on each of the job positions. A detailed lesson plan, task sheet, assignment sheet and colorful picture depicting each Frisch's product have been created to assist the student in learning each menu item.

Greene County's partnership with Frisch's has been a successful rela-

tionship since its startup in 1991. The students are benefiting in a variety of ways—gaining self-esteem, confidence, job skills and opportunities. Thorough planning and implementation of the program permit the goals of this partnership to be met. As an educator it is rewarding to be involved in a program such as this one, because meeting the educational needs and job skills of the students allows everyone involved to become a success. ■

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