

Taking a fresh look at senior living foodservice

Unidine's senior living facilities explore new ways to slow dementia and Alzheimer's



BOSTON – Unidine, a major foodservice management services company here, is working to help slow the progression of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's with a creative new program, Fresh Bites, for memory care patients.

The effort focuses on delivering nutrient-dense, bite-size meals that could reduce the weight loss typically associated with rapid progression of "dementia diseases."

"We heard from our senior living clients that weight loss and the inability to eat independently was often a catalyst for dementia disease progression. So we began working on a solution that would increase nutritional intake and provide a more dignified approach to dining for memory care patients," explains Richard B. Schenkel, Unidine CEO and founder.

The multi-pronged solution was researched and tested for 18 months with Unidine's chefs exploring specific food ingredients, recipe assembly, visual menus and specialized staff training.

They came up with a transformation of menu items into finger foods that are easily eaten without utensils, dealing with the issue of loss of motor skills in memory care patients.

The menu-tuning created finger foods that are cool enough to hold yet still warm, eliminated dry fillings that tend to fall apart, and slippery boiled vegetables. The chefs used ingredients such as rice paper, polenta, potato cups and cucumber slices to create vessels and wraps for the finger foods for meals and snacks.

At Unidine, Director of Nutrition Jenny Overly explains that "we discovered foods that limit/prevent or reverse degenerative disease." A big part of working in senior living, she notes, is the risk of Alzheimer's and dementia increasing as patients age.

It starts at around age 65, she points out, and as the Baby Boomers age, those affected will grow in numbers. "You see the deficits and the risk they develop and we want to do something different to stop the progression of the disease." The farther the disease advances,

Creative hand-held foods give patients new freedom



the harder it becomes for the affected person to eat food.

"Before Fresh Bites, menu choices for memory care were often limited to sandwiches and chicken fingers or facilities would cut up regular menu item foods. We found that miniature versions of foods are more stable and our clients have told us that the variety in our menu cycles changes the whole experience," Schenkel says. Some clients have had good results by offering Fresh Bites from the nurses' station versus the dining room for those who struggle to remain seated.

A critical component of Fresh Bites menu development is the infusion of specific ingredients that have shown promise in improving cognitive function such as turmeric, broccoli, cabbage, green tea, blueberries and dark chocolate are woven into recipes based on current research. Research at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center of Aging at Tufts University is focusing on the link between nutrition

and neurodegenerative diseases. Dennis Steindler, Ph.D. and director of the aging lab at Tufts, believes changing diet and nutrition may be able to limit inflammation of brain tissue and prevent or even reverse degenerative diseases.

The program began as a collaboration with a client, Intergrace-Copper Ridge in Sykesville, MD, that was a longtime supporter of treating Alzheimer's patients and related dementia. Additional clients joined, adding dedicated dining service managers to their memory care units. Unidine then committed to on-site training of kitchen and support staff as well as certification of dietitians worked with patients with dementia.

Fresh Bites rolls out to existing and new senior living center partners in 2016 with visual menus, enticing aromas, bright colored serving plates and techniques to help maintain the natural self-feeding reflex.

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Foodservice East celebrates 90

ANNIVERSARY

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hotel associations and the owner of Hotel Service, which managed the three-year-old New England Hotel Exposition starting in 1929. Harold Dolby worked for Clark and later, became the owner of Hotel Service, which his son, Richard joined after getting out of the U.S. Army and they carried on the tradition of reporting industry news.

The industry in New England and the Northeast has grown beyond their expectations and in the past 10 years has seen exponential restaurant development that few could have anticipated, expanding aggressively into the suburbs of major regional cities from New York to Hartford,



Providence, Boston and Portland to name a few.

Today's era of social networking brought about by the worldwide web has led numerous publications to leave the world of print and enter the digital realm. Foodservice East is proud to join them with this very first digital edition and hopes to have more extensive online interactions with its readership in the days to come.



Training is a key to successful restaurants, says Johnson

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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Young Guns, all in 2014, and being recognized as Chef of the Year by New York African Restaurant Week, Rising Star Community Chef by Star Chefs, and a nomination for a James Beard Foundation Rising Star Chef award, all in 2015, did not go to his head. "It's a lot, going into a success, for me. Before it was the micro but now it's the macro. 30 Under 30 made me think."

This year, he's having fun on Esquire's "The Next Great Burger," a show he declares is one everyone can relate to. He'd like to do a Cecil cookbook, he discloses, and open his own full-blown restaurant concept. Johnson praises Smalls for discovering and mentoring him. "One person has to believe in you and you can prove you can do it."

At 31, he attributes his "secret" of success to his passion for the industry and "my drive to really push, along with support from friends and family - people believing in you."

Talking about the industry and the relationship it has with minorities and women, he notes proudly that one of his two female sous chefs is black and another, Asian. He sees the industry changing over the past five or more years, with women assuming more roles. "It's coming very soon. We have good balance here."

Finger foods are eaten without utensils

THE OTHER SIDE

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It was important, Overly points out, to give the patients the ability to feed themselves. "When someone is fed by another person they lose that ability to do it themselves. We wanted to help them be independent. The 'vessels' are edible envelopes for feeding them. They were fun for our chefs to create. We thought about wraps, pita pockets, potato cups - we fill them with scrambled eggs or turkey and mashed potato and they are nourishing bite-size portions. We wrap salads in lettuce leaves. The ingredients are high in anti-oxidants that could prevent or slow the diseases. The majority of fruits we serve are high in them - blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and green vegetables too."

The pilot, she says, got positive feedback from patients. They become easily distracted and with the portable bites, can sit and lounge and eat more or even pace. The impact is the patients are better nourished and it's nice to see them feeling better.

Fresh Bites is now in six facilities, she adds, and will grow. "We are training and educating clients and team members to understand more about these diseases."

**Editor & Publisher
Susan Holaday
thanks advertisers
and readers
alike for their
support as FSE
moves toward the
100-year-mark**

