When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Washington University in St. Louis Dining Services (WUSTL Dining) and Bon Appétit Management Company (WUSTL Dining’s food service partner on campus) had to move quickly to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Like food service operators across the country, the team found themselves shifting service styles and implementing new health precautions—in some cases overnight. While working to keep staff and students safe when visiting dining locations, the team used the disruption as an opportunity, kick-starting a wave of innovative practices on campus that resulted in new and improved systems and exciting programming. While the physical distancing stanchions and wayfinding signage may now be gone, many of the forward-thinking improvements made to WUSTL Dining programs have been preserved, providing a better and more convenient experience for students and the wider campus community.

**CONVENIENT AND CONTACTLESS OFFERINGS**

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was apparent that students needed flexible, quick, and safe dining options. Grab-and-go meals were an immediate focus, with the team ramping up the quantity and variety of grab-and-go entrées available at two of WashU’s convenience stores: Paws & Go and Millbrook Market. Meanwhile, the team transitioned to cashless payments across campus to make check-out contactless, while implementing a fee-less version of Grubhub. Service at Ibby’s Café and Parkside Café, (which won a 2020 NACUFS Loyal E. Horton Grand Prize for Retail Sales Single Concept/Multiple Concepts/Marketplace), were adjusted to facilitate contactless ordering and pick-up throughout the pandemic.

**MAKING STUDENTS FEEL AT HOME**

When students returned to campus for the first time during the pandemic, they were immediately met with unfamiliar rules and procedures; including a quarantine program for students who tested positive for COVID-19. The WUSTL Dining team recognized that students were going through a time of uncertainty and adjustment and realized that they could provide comfort and support through the familiar and comforting

**Peter Todaro**
Content Specialist
Bon Appétit Communications
on behalf of Washington University in St. Louis Dining Services
With new and exciting food truck options outside, we are easing pressure on the dining team. Students a convenient and safe outdoor food option while on campus three nights a week during peak business days, giving a aptly named Food Truck Program brings five food trucks onto campus three nights a week during peak business days, giving students a convenient and safe outdoor food option while easing pressure on the dining team.

WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS TO STAFFING AND PRODUCT SHORTAGES

As operators across the country are acutely aware, the food service industry has been plagued by the dual problems of staffing shortages and supply chain issues. In order to combat these challenges, WUSTL Dining developed solutions that bring local restaurants and food trucks onto campus. The aptly named Food Truck Program brings five food trucks onto campus three nights a week during peak business days, giving students a convenient and safe outdoor food option while easing pressure on the dining team.

With new and exciting food truck options outside, WUSTL Dining’s Bites of St. Louis program brings local restaurants into the dining halls to serve signature dishes at specific stations. The program helps to introduce students to St. Louis’ acclaimed culinary scene while providing restaurants with an opportunity to make up for revenue lost during the pandemic. “The Bites of St. Louis program embodies the spirit of WUSTL Dining Services and the desire to reach well beyond the walls of the Danforth Campus,” said executive chef Patrick McElroy. “It is an amazing extension of community, culture, and cuisine under one roof. This past year presented many dark nights filled with obstacles and distractions, but our local partners mended many open holes with staffing challenges, supported supply chain issues and helped battle COVID-19 head on.” For Andrew Watling, the associate director of dining services, the extent to which the program helped students explore the city during a time of limited mobility cannot be understated. “The best way to know a city is through its food,” said Watling. “Sure, you can visit the Arch or go to the museums, but I can’t think of a better introduction to St. Louis than a hot pastrami from Gioia’s Deli or some barbecue from Pappy’s.”

For the WUSTL Dining team, the challenges of the pandemic proved to be an opportunity to improve service for students, resulting in lasting positive improvements to the dining program.

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