

GOING GREEN AT OVERLAKE

By Mark Eggleston, Director of Hospitality Services, Overlake Hospital Medical Center

The worldwide “green” movement has taken strong root here in the Evergreen state. Organizations large and small, businesses and concerned citizens have made efforts to implement programs and policies that are better for our health, our environment and our planet. Over the past several years, Overlake Hospital Medical Center joined the effort and put together a Go Green, Go Healthy program that started in the Hospitality Services Department, but has since spread throughout our organization.

The program initially began when we hired Head Chef Chris Linaman in 2006. Chris brought with him a real passion for organic and natural foods. Before joining Overlake, Chris spent five years at Seattle’s Sorrento Hotel and several years at Microsoft where he learned to appreciate cooking with the finest, freshest ingredients possible. Two of his first recommendations for Overlake Dining Services were to add organic greens to the menu and offer daily fresh salads. Another change was to find a source for healthful, multigrain breads and bakery products. Bread is now supplied by Seattle’s Macrina Bakery and other bakery products are purchased through Mostly Muffins, whose products are 99 percent trans fat-free. Dining Services also eliminated trans fats from all cooking.

Traditionally, hospital kitchens have used an institutional style of food preparation with a lot of frying or reheating frozen, prepared foods. Today, the trend is toward restaurant-quality menu options with farm-to-table food choices and lower-fat preparations. Fish has become another regular menu staple, and not the deep-fat fried variety, but choices like grilled ahi tuna, cod and salmon. We procure these lean and heart-healthy fish from EcoFish, a distributor of seafood from ecologically sustainable sources.

Part of our approach is to choose local purveyors of high-quality products who practice environmentally friendly policies. Some of the sustainable foods we offer include



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Starbucks fair trade coffee, local organic greens, rBGH-free milk and organic yogurt. For employees and visitors in need of a snack when the cafés are closed, we offer a healthier selection of vending machine food and beverage choices.

Hospitality Services has also implemented a number of changes to reduce waste and minimize our impact on the environment. We eliminated all Styrofoam products and switched to recyclable and compostable paper products. We also began a comprehensive recycling program of mixed paper, plastic and glass in all patient care units and departments on campus. In addition, Overlake started working with the city of Bellevue and Cedar Grove Compost Company to begin a food and paper composting program. Leftover food scraps from the catering and café kitchens as well as patient meal trays are separated into appropriate bins for recycling and

composting. Three days a week, compost bins are emptied and the material is turned into soil-enriching compost for local yards and landscaping services.

Last spring, the Go Green, Go Healthy program expanded further when we signed the Health Care Without Harm’s Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge. The objective of the pledge is to improve the health of patients, communities and the environment. This program is facilitated by Overlake’s Green Team, an employee group comprising representatives from multiple departments. The team recommends and implements socially responsible practices to promote the health of patients, employees and the environment.

Current projects for this year include promoting employee wellness and alternative commute programs, evaluating the current supply chain to explore purchasing more environmentally friendly alternatives, planting an organic garden on campus for patients and employees to help cultivate, and continuing to fully implement the recycling program in all areas of the hospital.

The idea of going green at Overlake started with using the highest-quality ingredients, freshly prepared to create appetizing, healthful meals. Now, the program has expanded to include a Green Team leadership group, more stringent vendor selection, comprehensive composting and recycling, and an increased awareness by staff of their personal and environmental health. This experience shows that the most important commitment any individual or organization can make in the campaign to go green is to get started. The tremendous benefits—healthier people and a healthier community—are well worth the effort.

Helpful Web Sites:

www.overlakehospital.org
www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org