

# Sushi Scores Big at Appalachian State

**S**tudents on the declining balance residential meal plan at Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., have a wide selection of dining options to choose from. Those include a variety of signature branded concepts, such as Hoagie's Sub Shop and an Asian concept called Chung's, as well as popular national brands such as Chick-fil-A and McAlister's Deli. Recently, a new concept joined the line-up at the university, Sushi with Gusto.

The primary Sushi with Gusto outlet is within the Welborne Cafeteria in Welborne Hall. There, a gourmet sushi chef makes the sushi in front of the students. In addition, sushi is available at other outlets across campus, including the Food Court in Welborne Hall, the Cascades Café in the Plemmons Student Union and the Market convenience store in Trivette Hall. Sushi for all outlets is made fresh each day, with unsold items removed and discarded daily.

According to Pat Weaver, associate director of food services at Appalachian State, the decision to bring in sushi was based on several factors. One was sushi's growing popularity on campuses nationwide. Another was requests from students. Finally, there was a desire to offer something different. "Our goal is always to please the students," she said. "That's what we're here for; that's what keeps us going. So we like to keep things different and not let monotony set in."

So far, the decision to bring in sushi seems to have been a good one. "The concept has been very successful for us," Weaver said. "When we negotiated the contract, the goal was that we maintained \$2,000 a week in sales. The first week we operated, we did \$8,859 in sales, which is a total 1,751 trays of sushi." Weaver added that even after the initial novelty had worn off, sales continued to hold in the \$7,000-a-week range. "We are very pleased."

Once the decision to introduce sushi was made, the next task was to select a supplier. "We began to look into this and talked to two different companies, including Sushi with Gusto, which is based in Greer, S.C.," Weaver said "We liked what we heard from Sushi with Gusto, so we decided to go with them."

According to Weaver, the contract with Sushi with Gusto required only a minimal initial investment. The university's primary commitment is to provide space for the outlet, along with access to refrigeration and electricity. In return, the company provides a sushi chef, product and more. "Everything is done by their staff," Weaver said. "They make their own sushi, do the cleanup and do their own deliveries." The university retains 25 percent of sales, with the rest going to the company.

At Welborne Cafeteria, the Sushi with Gusto concept is located next to a concept called The Light Side, which sells all vegetarian and vegan offerings. That location has contributed to Sushi with Gusto's success. "We find that a lot of our vegetarians also like the vegetarian sushi offerings," Weaver said.

More significant, however, is the quality of the product. "It is interesting to talk to the various people that buy the sushi about what they think of it," Weaver said. "Those that really know sushi say that it is really high quality. One faculty member told me that he lived in Japan for two years, and that he really knows about sushi, and the quality of this sushi is outstanding. We've had a lot of positive comments like that."

One of the challenges in opening the new concept is educating customers about sushi. "When you say 'sushi,' a lot of people immediately think of raw fish," Weaver said. "In reality, only about 12 percent of the sushi we sell is made with raw fish. Some of the more popular varieties have been the cooked sushi like the California roll [made with crab meat, avocado and cucumber], the Philadelphia roll [smoked salmon, cream cheese and cucumber], crispy shrimp and barbecued eel."

Overall, Weaver is pleased with the concept, with the company and with the quality of the new offerings. "There's always a risk when you bring in a new concept, but it has been real successful for us," she said. "We have found the people with Sushi with Gusto have been very nice to work with and have helped us with any minimal problems that we might have had. They did what they said they would do, and there was good follow up."

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