

## TOSSING IN INGENUITY:

# PASTA WITH PIZZAZZ

**J**ames Brant, fsd at the Natl. Association of Securities Dealers (NASD) in Rockville, MD, points out that countering the ubiquity of pasta requires some ingenuity. “Everybody serves ziti, so we have to give the customers something different,” he says. “For variety, we change pasta dishes all the time. We have to!” Meanwhile, other operators across the country are doing the same.

Brant and his foodservice staff serve approx. 800 daily lunchtime customers at this Brock & Co. account and utilize approx. 100 lbs. of assorted dry, frozen and fresh pasta each month, including product produced for a once-a-week Italian pasta bar. The bar is so popular that 55% to 60% of customers choose it when available.

“The main thing is to put the emphasis on fresh ingredients—fresh herbs, fresh produce and very good quality olive oil,” Brant asserts. “We give them options including shrimp, prosciutto, pancetta, shiitake mushrooms, tomatoes and Romano cheese. Pasta varieties include fettucine, angel hair, whole wheat linguine, spaghetti,

penne, etc. Mostly we use dry pasta because of the volume of business,” he adds.

NASD customers seeking a lowfat pasta entree are reportedly more than satisfied with a wheat linguine and chicken dish sauteed to-order in jalapeno oil. Fresh mango or papaya is added prior to deglazing the pan with soy sauce.

**With a wasabi flourish:** “A touch of wasabi mustard is added to the soy for flavor, plus plain yogurt. But take the pan off the heat or the yogurt will break, then add fresh cilantro as a finishing touch,” he suggests.

To prepare carbonara sauce, a specialty of the house, pancetta (i.e., Italian bacon) is sauteed along with diced peppered ham, diced prosciutto,



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onion and quartered shiitake mushrooms until “just a touch browned.” The carbonara sauce is then tossed—in front of the customer—with semolina fettucine.

For a unique tossed mushroom lasagna, Brant and staff start with a cooked lasagna cut into strips. Saute portabella, cremini and button mushrooms with leeks; deglaze pan with sherry, then add heavy cream. In a bowl, toss with lasagna strips plus fresh baby spinach leaves, mozzarella cheese and fresh diced tomatoes. Served with grilled bruschetta and garlic tomato, it’s a solid seller priced at \$5.95.

Occasionally, when pasta is prepared from-scratch at this NASD location, the liq-

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uid required can be varied. “We’ve done water plus cucumber juice or added saffron to the water,” Brant explains.

Just last month, Rodney Williams, Morrison Management Specialists’ exec. chef at North Shore Regional Medical Ctr. in Slidell, LA, began offering a separate pasta station featuring a twice-a-week “special” such as blackened shrimp pasta (bowties) in Alfredo sauce.

**20-oz. pasta portions:** “Pesto sauce as well as meat sauce and spaghetti are available too. There’s also a pasta called ‘Unlike-No-Other Pasta’ that is prepared with four types of meat: hot sausage, diced turkey, shrimp and smoked sausage served over fettucine with a white Alfredo sauce and topped with Parmesan cheese and green onions. The portion size is 4 oz. per pasta and they can try all five with extra Parmesan—that’s 20 oz. of pasta—for \$5.50. They want it, they love it, and many go for the whole 20 oz. Out of 300 customers, 180 to 190 will get all five,” he asserts.

Williams finds his Louisiana customers are choosing more pasta dishes than in the past. They’re fond of Cajun recipes such as jambalaya prepared with red beans and rice, crayfish with red beans and rice, and etouffee, yet pasta is now enjoyed as “nouvelle cuisine.”

To expand the offerings,

Williams—who works with several area hospitals to develop promotions for their pasta bars—is currently developing a selection of cold pasta salads. These include grilled chicken with penne; cold au gratin pasta with various meats such as pepperoni; plus macaroni salad with red and green peppers.

**Blackened shrimp beckons:** “Our customers’ favorite is blackened shrimp with penne pasta topped with Parmesan and green onions. Macaroni and cheese, straight-up, is also very big. But overall, penne pasta is the favorite type of pasta,” he says.

For the 180 students on board plan at Middlebury (VT) College, pasta is on the cycle menu for lunch and even more frequently menued for dinner, exec. chef David Phelps reports.



Pasta is also a mainstay in vegetarian dishes which are chosen by meat-eaters as well. Here, a vegan lasagna, prepared from-scratch, is chosen by 30% of the customers. It includes a filling of butternut squash, black beans and silken tofu which is much like ricotta. Eggless pasta sheets are purchased locally from Anythings Pastable.

“Our Mexican ravioli—a cold salad prepared with eggplant ravioli purchased frozen—includes red and green peppers, onions, jalapeno peppers, cherry tomatoes, frozen corn, kidney and black beans with garlic cilantro dressing plus a touch of lemon juice, olive oil and cumin,” Phelps says.

**Mac-and-cheese plus:** To add interest to standard macaroni and cheese (prepared with dry elbow macaroni), Phelps and staff add broccoli and/or ham. And, for a “meatball” and pasta dish, chicken sausage is the preferred meat ingredient, added to fusilli, black bean lentils and tomatoes all layered with marinara sauce.

“Our students don’t like frozen meatballs, therefore we do them from-scratch for a special event featuring spaghetti and meatballs. Of all the pastas, their favorite is ziti or penne, and pesto is the most popular sauce,” Phelps explains.

Recently, in conjunction with a NACUFS contest, the f/s staff created a Vegetarian Marketplace featuring bean and pasta recipes. Selections include: squash and black bean vegan lasagna; orzo with beans and fennel etc. He believes all offer potential for future menus.

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