Healthy Eating Ministry

A hospital might not be the first place a hungry down-town worker thinks of when going out to grab a bite of lunch. But perhaps it should be.

Conemaugh Memorial Main Campus Crossroads Cafe, 3rd Floor 1086 Franklin St., (814) 534-5779

he cafeterias at the Lee campus downtown and at the main campus in the 8th Ward offer homemade food at reasonable prices from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. 365 days a year. Sodexo Services partners with Conemaugh for the food and nutrition department. Pam Syster is department director. While created to feed patients, staff and guests, the cafeterias are open to the general public as well.

"Not everybody realizes that they can come in and have a meal," Syster says. But once a customer tries the food, they are usually hooked. "So many times people will remark that it really isn't like hospital food. We're trying to get rid of that stigma because we're not like that at all."

Ryan Smith is the executive chef at the main campus and Edie Durant is operations manager at Lee. Syster speaks highly of the two. "They don't get the recognition they deserve," she says. "Their food is out of this world. They do an awesome job."



Chef Smith says among the popular items at the main campus is the Honey Pecan Chicken Breast — made from a 5-oz. boneless chicken breast dredged through seasoned bread crumbs then roasted in the oven and topped with pecans and sustainable honey. "Everything is homemade," the chef says. "We do a lot of scratch cooking. We also try to buy local as much as possible and use the area farmer's markets when available."

A full-time baker satisfies the visitor's sweet tooth. "Our nobakes are known across the city as the best in town," the chef says. He describes his cafeteria this way: "It's inexpensive, convenient, wellness driven and it offers a high-quality meal. You can't beat it."

By Arlene Johns
Photos by Judy Crookston



die Durant, operations manager at Lee, says it's not just the food that makes her cafeteria special. "We have a fabulous staff," she says. "They understand that everything that goes out of this department represents each and every one of us. They don't just serve food — they offer sympathy and hugs and smiles." Edie says she sees some faces regularly. "We have outside customers that come for breakfast, lunch and dinner - five days a week."

Daily specials include Chicken Cordon Bleu and Salmon Provencal. Three days a week, the Innovations Bar offers the chance for customers to try something different. A Sizzlin' Salad includes a choice of chicken,

shrimp or beef along with asparagus, zucchini, yellow squash, broccoli, mushrooms, onions, fresh garlic and other toppings that are run through an oven and then placed on a bed of lettuce and topped with fresh parmesan cheese — all while the patron watches.

Edie says the Wrap Bar includes flour tortilla shells — spinach or tomato basil - that are loaded with lettuce, chicken beef, and other choices. "We also offer comfort foods like our mac and cheese, chicken pot pie and hot roast beef sandwiches. And if someone wants a special sandwich we will try to make it.

"It's not about earning a huge profit; it's about

