

Avoiding Recipes for Disaster

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To earn a full payoff, key details for every aspect of a kitchen design project—from financial planning to floor layout—must be carefully conceived and executed.

A kitchen renovation may not be as glamorous, or evident, as adding a new pool—but as food and beverage service, and revenues, have become a more critical part of club operations, glaring deficiencies in back-of-the-house facilities have prompted many properties to move kitchen upgrades to the top of their to-do lists.

It's not always easy; remodeling a kitchen requires careful research, preparation and execution. Delays are common, and plans change. But the end result—a better, more efficient foodservice operation—can be a delicious dish, indeed.

Reasons to Renovate

The kitchen at the Des Moines Golf and Country Club in West Des Moines, Iowa, was 34 years old when the club spent \$250,000 to remodel it four years ago, as part of roughly \$1 million in capital renovations.

"The biggest thing, probably, was that the tile floor was starting to show some wear and had hollow spots," says General Manager Jim Cutter. "If it wasn't repaired, it would have become a safety issue."

While renovating kitchens because of needed repairs is a common driver, it is not the only one.

Timothy Minahan, CCM, wasn't General Manager of the Country Club of Buffalo in Williamsville, N.Y. when its kitchen renovation was planned, but he came in with the broom and dustpan three months later, after the club reopened. The main impetus behind the renovation, Minahan reports, was to improve efficiencies.

Because the kitchen bake shop and storage were previously in the basement, a la carte service had to shut down during a banquet, because the two operations used the same line.

"The kitchen was fragmented," Minahan says. "The impact to member activities when banquets were going on was just too great."

The Duquesne Club in Pittsburgh also renovated its kitchen to remove "major flow problems," according to Executive Chef Keith Coughenour.

"[Plus], the equipment was old and aging, the floors were uneven in certain areas, and spills would regularly leak into the dining rooms positioned below," Coughenour says. "We decided to do a complete renovation, floor to ceiling."

Decisions, Decisions

Whatever the reason for a renovation, once the project is approved, clubs tend to take a team approach to get needed input on new equipment, kitchen layout and a committee was formed comprised of the general manager, assistant general manager, chief engineer and Coughenour. For an outside perspective, the club hired a Colorado-based foodservice facility design firm that was also in the area to consult on the Pittsburgh Pirates' new stadium (PNC Park).

Coughenour also spoke with chefs who had recently renovated kitchens and toured the Bellagio's kitchens in Las Vegas to view cook-chill equipment, which was then added to Duquesne's design plans.

"I met with my sous and pastry chefs and chief steward to get their input," Coughenour says. "And I drew on a close relationship with the sales representative of a leading foodservice equipment provider, to help develop ideas on equipment brands and layout."

At the Des Moines Golf and Country Club, the head chef—along with the GM and clubhouse manager—essentially determined what was needed, Cutter says. "The chef had been here 18 years," he notes. "He knew what worked, and what he would like to have seen changed."

At the Country Club of Buffalo, the executive chef, dining room manager and staff weighed in on potential changes at that property.

"It's imperative [to include the staff]," Minahan says. "They have to have a say in how it's designed, because they're the ones who have to live with it."

Prep Pitch

Persuading staff that a kitchen needs work is easy; convincing members that their club kitchen needs an expensive update is often the bigger challenge.

"It's absolutely a more difficult sell," says Minahan, who said his club members received a \$5,000 assessment and dues increase for the work. "They're paying thousands, and even in though in terms of the assessments they're getting the benefit of [the kitchen] because service improves, when members put money into a facility, they want to see physical improvement."

Other clubs opt to pay part of the expense. "We implemented a capital campaign, soliciting members for financial support," says Coughenour. "[And] we financed a small portion of the cost."

Some clubs have found that conducting tours of existing conditions can help with the sales pitch—especially if interaction with existing staff who can "show and tell" where the problems are, is part of the walk-through.

Building the Dream

During its renovation, Des Moines Golf and Country Club—which has a main kitchen and smaller grill kitchen downstairs—put all equipment on wheels for simpler cleaning, added a new floor and replaced its tile walls with easier-to-clean stainless material.

"The kitchen itself changed very little," Cutter says. "The storage changed considerably. It moved to where the cooler and walk-in freezer are. It works much better to receive product." The total renovation time was just a month.

The Duquesne Club, on the other hand, changed virtually every piece of kitchen equipment during its five-year renovation (completed over a year ago, construction took two-and-a-half years, after an equally long planning period).

Phase one involved adding a 3,000-sq.-ft. third-floor kitchen at the rear of the building. Phase two included building the new garde manger, where cold dishes are prepared and refrigerated food is stored; the new banquet hot food line area was built in phase three. Construction of the two new a la carte dining island suites (see photo, pg. 24) came in phase four. In phase five, the club put in a new freezer for ice cream and gelato, which are now made on-site, and added a climate-control room to prepare sugar pieces, temper chocolate, and finish delicate desserts and pastries that require specific temperature and humidity.

Duquesne also added a water jet chill-and-cook tank with a fill station, which allows food to be cooled to the proper storage temperature in 20 minutes, versus four to six hours using iced water baths and running water.

Not all changes were to increase efficiency, though. "The most notable change was the addition of tempered air into the kitchen space," says Coughenour. "This single change probably affected the employees' morale in the most positive way."

Changing on the Fly

Despite meticulous planning, Duquesne's renovation hit some unavoidable bumps in the road.

"The initial plan did not address all of our issues," says Coughenour. So the club's architectural advisor was brought on as project manager, primarily to work with Coughenour to redesign the bulk food production area (see photo above), because the initial layout "just didn't feel right."

The design changes, along with construction delays that included problems lifting equipment through a large opening in the third-floor wall, pushed the completion date back. The Country Club of Buffalo's renovation was shorter—just four months—but its kitchen square footage increased by more than 30%, moving from an L-shape to a straight-line format. The club reused some equipment, but added new oak tops and ovens and a larger walk-in refrigerator.

Still, there were delays and unexpected revisions, Minahan says. "With older buildings, you run into a lot of surprises once you get behind the walls," he reports. "But we were able to value-engineer our way through those things."

Prep Area Parties

Even if members are thrilled that their lunch is being served faster, showing off the new kitchen isn't a bad PR move, Minahan says. "We had a great 'grand reopening party' to showcase the facility," he reports. "Because so much money was spent on the kitchen, we set up food stations in it, so people could go in and see what was built."

The party proved so popular that, seven years later, the club still holds it each spring. "We have the food stations in the kitchen," Minahan says. "The kitchen staff gets a kick out of having some face time with members."

But even if most members rarely, if ever, see them, kitchens still need to be kept up-to-date to keep them happy—and for clubs to remain profitable.

"Our Board is very forward-thinking," Cutter says. "They realize that if we're going to do \$3 million in food sales a year, people need the facilities and tools to do that."

SUMMING IT UP

- Persuading staff that a kitchen needs work is easy; convincing members or owners that the expense of an upgrade is justified is the real challenge. Sometimes, the best way to help sell a project is to give tours of the existing kitchen and have staff "show and tell" what's standing in the way of better quality and service.
- After the work is done, more tours should be given to show the positive results, especially if members have had to foot the bill. One club now even has a popular annual "prep area party," with food stations set up in the new kitchen.



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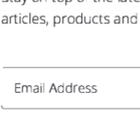

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