

Ask the Design Experts

By Liz Campbell



Chalk up a huge success for FCSI at the National Restaurant Association (NRA) Hotel 2005 Restaurant, Hotel & Motel Show. In a smartly-styled area featuring chic curves and catchy signs, FCSI volunteer consultants met with “clients” who needed help with their design challenges.

A joint offering of FCSI and NRA, the area at the NRA show was titled “Ask the Design Experts” and provided opportunities for visitors to bring their difficulties or questions to experts during a 30-minute consultation. Long before the show opened, the reserved appointment schedule, on the hour time slots, had filled. But FCSI chose to keep the half-hour slots open for drop-ins. And there were lots of these – enough in fact, to keep the six consultants on hand each day busy throughout the four-day show. During that time, more than 300 operators from 40 states and several countries met with the 24 FCSI volunteers who manned the six consulting tables.

Questions dealt with everything from, “How can I get this project funded?” to “How do I change this design to accommodate current needs?” Bill Eaton, FCSI, president of Cini-Little International, Inc. in Germantown, MD, spent a day in the seat. “Most of the people I spoke to were smaller companies looking at small scale expansion and trying to solve individual equipment or service problems,” he said. “Often they wanted confirmation that they were doing what they should be doing, or they wanted specific feedback.”

I watched as John Egnor, FCSI, president of JEM Associates in Linwood, NJ, conferred with a threesome working with the foodservice operation of a small company. Expansion of the firm has resulted in a need for expansion of the foodservice facility and they had drawn up some designs with the help of a contractor. But they

had not met with a consultant. Egnor explained how several of the design measures could be improved, saving them money and improving flow through the facility. Drawing lines on the spare blueprint copy they had brought along, he showed them how they could better locate the exhaust hoods and venting, how they could optimize traffic flow, even how they could eliminate one hand sink and place these more strategically. Egnor had

very little time and had never seen the facility, but his expertise was apparent.

Afterwards they said, “We didn’t come here so he would say everything looks great, but he’s helped us see other options, other ways we could be doing things.” Unfortunately, some changes had already been made so it was too late to implement some of his suggestions. Did they feel having a consultant would have been better?





John Egnor, FCSI, consults with a trio from an expanding company's foodservice operation. Drawing on their blueprint, he offers suggestions to improve flow through the kitchen.

"We couldn't really afford a consultant," said their team leader, who added, after a moment's thought, "I guess we really couldn't afford not to. We could have saved a lot using his ideas."

Another visitor from a small foodservice operation enthused, "It was very informative. I really appreciated them taking the time to talk to me." And a third, from a large corporate facility added, "I was going to do this on my own, but I've taken that consultant's card. I think we need help."

Kathleen Seelye, FFCSCI, is president of foodservice planning for Ricca Newmark Design in Centennial, CO. She too, took a turn in the chair. "It's been years since I've sat down with a first-time operator excited about his new operation and helped him," she said. "We usually work with large operators. It was so exciting to see the level of enthusiasm that comes from someone who has been thinking about opening that first restaurant for

years, researching every aspect of it." Seelye says she truly enjoyed being part of their passion for half an hour. "They bring it to you and try to give you that vision in just a few minutes. To be part of a few critical decisions or even minor adjustments is very rewarding."

David Phillips, CFSP, FCSI, president of F & B Equipment Services, Inc. in Hoschton, GA, used to live in Chicago and still does business there. When he took a chair in the booth, his consultations included everything, "From kitchen layout, recommending flooring services, recommending architects and discussing cooking techniques," he said. And the most unusual questions came from "a high end dude ranch with a gourmet chuck wagon." He was so enthused about the experience that he wrote a letter to the education program manager of the National Restaurant Association, Eliza De Michele:

"I would like to sincerely express what a great experience I had with my participation in "Ask the Design Experts" (ATDE)



Ted Barber, FCSI, offers some creative ideas to a group looking for ways to improve their operation.

at the NRA show. I met foodservice operators from around the world, had great dialogue with all of them and found some new clients as well. I had such a jam-packed, intriguing schedule, I called two of my associates who were out walking the show to come in and help me!

The booth layout and reception area was very professional looking, yet still comfortable. I thought Sarah did a great job as a receptionist and I gave her a recommendation for an internship she was looking for in Chicago. The feed back I received from the show attendees that knew about the booth was very positive.

I would like to see FCSI get involved with the NAFEM and FEDA shows with the same type of concept as ATDE. It was a great relaxed avenue for showing the world what an FCSI consultant is all about. It seemed to break down the image that consultants are expensive and only should be used for big budget projects...."

"I think we are really on to something," commented David Drain, FCSI's executive vice president. "The members I talked to were thrilled with the experience and asked to make sure they were included if we did it again next year. Bill Eaton deserves a lot of credit for setting up the meeting with the NRA in 2004. Alan Plassche, a consultant to the NRA, was also instrumental in making this happen. I've exchanged emails with the NRA since the show and all indications are that we will have the pavilion again next year.

Coincidentally, the folks at NAFEM had been working on a similar concept themselves and I'm pleased that FCSI will sponsor a similar pavilion at this year's NAFEM Show in Anaheim. I'm also in talks with the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association about offering this concept at the HostEx show in Toronto." 🌐