

Jim Bingham, Director of Food Services, Rochester Institute of Technology Receives Circle of Excellence Award

In a way, food service has been a part of Jim Bingham's life since the beginning. Bingham grew up as one of the nine children on a dairy farm in central New York. Although dairy was in his blood, food would become his passion.

In 1966, Bingham attended Morris Hill, and later went to work at the renowned Kinlock Pub. From there he decided to attend Rochester Institute of Technology to get his bachelors degree. While at RIT he worked at Strong Memorial Hospital and RIT's catering department. When he finished at RIT in 1970, Bingham decided that there was no place like home.

"I had several job offers, but the best job offer was to stay right at RIT," he said. "It has always been a great place to work. There have always been changes and opportunities to grow in my position."

Bingham began as a production manager for the school's largest dining facility. He was then promoted to area director and later, assistant director. In 1981 Bingham was named Director of Food Services, a post he has held ever since. Bingham pointed out that although the food service division is owned by RIT, it is a business unto itself.

"We are required to provide all food service on campus," he said. "That means 11,000 meals a day in full session, which runs from the end of August through the end of May. We operate ten different facilities on campus, including convenience stores, large meal plan facilities, retail operations and a large catering business as well." Bingham noted that food service recently passed \$18 million in sales and the school invests \$300,000 annually on refreshing and renovating the facilities. "Part of my responsibility is to

make sure we provide all the required services on campus, meet the budgetary goals, and stay modernized," he said. "It's a challenge to keep fresh and to offer the menu items that

are required by a very demanding customer base."

Bingham said the dietary habits of college students have not changed much since he was a student, with hamburgers, pizzas, and fries remaining "staples".

What has changed is

the ability to meet those needs. "We're offering the flexibility of grazing a little more in a traditional dining facility," he said. "We do offer healthy alternatives, but they are not taken as often. We have to keep an ear to what the trends are. The old days of meatloaf and casserole are gone. They want foods that they can pick up and take with them."

Still, Bingham and his team are working to keep students as healthy as possible. Last year they switched all of their frying and cooking oils to one with no trans fats. When a local reporter asked a student about the change he replied, "I'm too busy to be concerned about what I'm eating, so I'm glad someone else is." It is a comment that left Bingham with a good feeling. "We enjoy keeping ourselves on our toes and doing the best we can for the students," he said. "Not one year has been the same as the previous year, that's the excitement of any business."

Working with Bingham are 100 full time employees, as well as approximately 600 students, some of who come from within the same school of hospitality and service management where Bingham earned his degree. "Many of the managers and supervisors that work within our program are graduates of the program as well," Bingham said. "It's very

rewarding to see students who have gone to RIT go on to work at RIT. It adds meaning to the educational process. One of the sayings at RIT is, "Earn a living and live a life" it's nice to see them doing it right here at the campus they graduated from."



A Message From Friends to Congratulate Jim Bingham

Dear Jim,

I was just informed that you have been chosen to receive the 2006 Empire State News Circle of Excellence Award. I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to you on this fine recognition of your abilities.

You are an outstanding member of the Rochester food service community. I know that all your peers hold you in high esteem and recognize you and your staff as true leaders in the college and university segment.

On behalf of all my associates at Spectrum, we want to congratulate you on this great achievement.

*--Clarence Houk
executive vice president
Spectrum Food Service Associates*

Jim,

Your friendship and business has meant a great deal to me over the years. No one deserves this honor more. Your dedication at RIT Food Service has helped it grow into one of the top food service institutions in upstate New York. Congratulations!

*--Mark Kaufman
Empire State Venture Corp.*