

Capital Campaign: Kitchen and Dining Hall Renovation

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Van Lunen Fellows Project

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The kitchen and dining hall at Racine Lutheran High School had faithfully served students hot lunch for more than forty years. In the spring of 2013, the city building inspector found that our grease trap was not functioning properly. He ordered that it be replaced before the kitchen could be used to start the 2013 school year. In making plans to replace the grease trap, we found many other concerns with the safety and efficiency of the utilities, appliances, and the overall traffic flow for serving students. The limited cooler and freezer space required frequent and costly deliveries. The space for food preparation was cramped and unsanitary. The heating system required that the entire north end of the building be heated during evening and weekend events. The lack of air conditioning made this space very uncomfortable in warm weather. In the end, there was nothing in the kitchen and dining hall worth saving. A completely new design and renovation of the kitchen and dining hall space was needed.

What Did We Do?

Three major tasks needed to be accomplished in just a few months:

1. Secure an architect who had experience in designing kitchens for Christian high schools and understood the challenges of a private school, and begin to plan. The architect met with stakeholders to assess our needs and draw up plans that would allow us to complete the construction over two summers. It was important that the work done during the summer of 2013 would fit into the work planned for the summer of 2014 so that time and materials would not be repeated or wasted. We established several goals that this project:

Goals. 1. Meet all city code expectations for the city of Racine 2. Improve the lunch menu to include a healthier, wider variety of foods 3. Offer students a healthy breakfast option

before school 4. Realize energy savings in new appliances and a walk-in cooler/freezer 5. Realize a savings in bulk purchases by increasing the food storage space 6.) Increase the work space of the kitchen by 50% by expanding into an adjacent hallway 7.) Renovate the eating area into an appealing restaurant, dining hall design, with a separate HVAC system.

2. Seek bids from contractors and equipment suppliers for the renovation of the kitchen in two phases. Phase I would be completed during the summer of 2013. It included the replacement of the condemned grease trap, a new dishwasher, and the plumbing necessary before the opening of school in the fall (2013). Phase II would be completed during the summer of 2014. This phase included the complete demolition of the remaining kitchen area and adjoining hallway, the renovation of the kitchen and cafeteria, the installation of new appliances and a walk-in cooler/freezer, and a separate HVAC system.

3. Design a capital campaign to pay for it all by the end of 2014. We started by assembling a group of individuals to serve on the campaign committee, choosing those who had a history of financial support for our high school. The unveiling of our plans started in late October 2013, with a cocktail party at the local country club. At this event we presented the plans for the kitchen and gave potential donors some basic information about the project and asked that they each return in one month with eight to ten guests who could kick off the campaign with a generous gift. This second meeting had the same cocktail-appetizer format. A powerpoint presentation of information and pictures demonstrated the critical need for each person to commit to this project. We offered examples of several giving plans and the opportunity to take advantage of their deductions on both their 2013 and 2014 tax returns. The total cost for the two summers of renovations would total \$411,000. Following this event we spent the

majority of our time making follow up contacts and meeting new contacts (personal visits, phone calls, emails, update mailings) with corporate and individual donors. We included in this list of contacts parents, alumni, all donors in our data base, students, faculty, Board members, local business and foundations.

What Has Changed?

Many positive changes have occurred. As a result of our efforts, we will accomplish all of our goals. We are on target to complete this project on time and with the necessary funding by the end of 2014. We are optimistic at this point that we will finish under budget.

The new design and decor will create a dining experience that will have that “WOW factor” for our students and guests. The new design will remove congestion and offer intimate seating, attractive new lighting, and designer wall painting. Students will now have breakfast options, as well as at least two menu choices each day for lunch, with an increased selection of side items. A condiment area will be built, away from the kitchen service lines, to relieve congestion. This area will offer students a salad bar, fresh condiments, silverware, microwave ovens, and hot water for teas and soups.

Additionally, we will realize savings through these improvements. There will be a savings from more energy efficient appliances, the walk-in cooler/freezer, new lighting, and the new HVAC unit. We anticipate additional revenue from lunch sales, as well as from the new addition of offering our students a breakfast option before school.

What Were the Challenges?

The first challenge came as we had just started our planning for our capital campaign. Our largest Lutheran feeder school and church announced that they were launching a capital campaign for their church and school at the same time we were. Working with them, we agreed to wait six months before we announced our campaign, and so we worked on silent requests from donors outside their congregation. The planners of the feeder school were pleased, and in the end, this compromise improved our relationship with them. Their campaign was very successful. Wanting to help us out, they committed a percentage of their campaign to go toward the debt they had in their high school association payments. To date they have paid half of this debt and plan to pay the other half by the end of 2014.

The biggest challenge I faced was learning to juggle my job as principal and executive director. I had a hard time finding time to step away from school business to focus on fund raising when we were preparing for an accreditation visit in December, followed by my assistant principal being out most of January and February with double knee replacement.

What Did I Learn From This Project?

At first I was skeptical that I was cut out for this fund raising stuff. This was just my second year in this community and because of a “Surprise! Your kitchen is condemned!” bombshell, I had to “ask” people I was meeting for the first time for support. I struggled for the right words at times. The philosophy that helped me through that fear was a simple line from the Van Lunen faculty. I think it was Dave Hahn who said, “If you are afraid to ask, you don’t believe in what your school is doing”. Well, I do believe in what Racine Lutheran is doing for the students. Focusing on our students when I “ask” makes it much easier. God has called me to

do this, so I pray for courage and just let it rip. In the process of all of this I have learned how enjoyable it is to spend time with some amazing people who understand how important it is to support the work of the church and our school.

The other thing that I learned is that when juggling administrative roles, I had to block out time each week to pick up the phone and get out to functions to meet people. When I waited for that free moment to appear, it rarely happened. I also learned the value of keeping data/notes on everyone I met. This data was a big help to me when writing thank you cards and in preparing for future contacts with donors.

Being one of the Van Lunen Fellows as I worked through the challenge of my first capital campaign gave me an invaluable resource to tap whenever needed. I would like to thank Don Distelberg for mentoring me through my first capital campaign and all of the Van Lunen faculty and Great Whites for their support and prayers.