

## .NEWS / INNOVATION

# Mather Looks to the Future

New dining concepts for CCRCs take into account the needs and desires of the baby boomer generation.

Evanston, Ill.—Continuing care retirement foodservice is preparing now for the influx of baby boomers that is underway and expected to continue through 2035. One provider is charting a new course for dining options with increased flexibility to meet a variety of needs.

Mather LifeWays, based in Evanston, Ill., is moving away from the traditional dinner in the dining room at a fixed time with a set menu in order to offer more options for its clients.

In Tucson, Ariz., at the now two-year-old Splendido, one of Southern Arizona's largest retirement communities, the company took an old building and redesigned it into four distinct dining venues around a central hub, according to Cara Baldwin, assistant vice president of Dining Services for Mather.

The resort-style community has two restaurant concepts, Marabella, with 70 seats, and Alonzo's Tucson Grille, with 140 seats, as well as an outdoor dining venue, the 60-seat Bella Vista.

"We're on the cutting edge of accommodating customers and the boomers who'll be coming soon," says Baldwin.

She predicts the industry will "have to have more choices for the boomers" who are used to food court-style options. "I expect as the boomers age, you'll see

more demand for cafeteria-style set ups. You'll always have to have choice."

At the company's newest community, The Mather, which is scheduled to open next year, in Evanston near the Northwestern University campus, the complex will have a dining venue that will be located in the center of the community and will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. "Residents can come down anytime," Baldwin explains. They can choose to make reservations or simply come down.

"Meals will change throughout the day. Our typical menus include entrées at lunch as well as dinner and there will be a wide variety of selections. If someone wants to order appetizers such as steamed mussels and flatbreads and call it a meal, they can."

The other venues at The Mather will be open for dinner, except for a 20-seat rooftop restaurant, overlooking the skyline and Lake Michigan, that will serve lunch and/or dinner as the weather permits.

One of the restaurants will be designed as a large horseshoe with a bar and a cooking line where guests can watch their meals being prepared.

"The entire menu," says

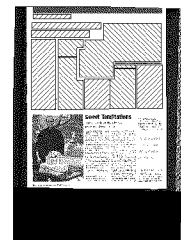
Baldwin, "can be executed with two pieces of equipment, a stone hearth wood and gas oven and a Turbo Chef oven.

Residents can opt for a number of different meal plan options from the one meal a day that is included in their monthly fee to 21 meals a month, or "Decide As You Dine," which allows residents to eat and pay à la carte as they go.

On meal plans such as one a day or 21 a month, all meals are priced the same. "It's the same 'cost' for steamed mussels and flatbreads as it is for a filet mignon dinner," Baldwin explains.

There are no limits on how much customers can eat, but there are no "to-go" options. Four different portion sizes are available from small or regular to large (one and a half times the size of regular) or double (twice as large as regular).

"They get unparalleled quality," Baldwin says. "Filet mignon is on the menu every day and lobster tail is on cycle menus. Now, seniors are looking for that comfort food, though some request healthier alternatives. Our 'Conscious Cuisine' items have a nutritional breakdown. Those are slower movers but we expect the next generation will eat healthier."



Splendido's Alonzo's Tuscon Grille offers its growing number of baby boomers an upscale dining option.

