

At Kimble's food by design: How Marketing Meets Customer Needs

When a client contracts with Kimble's food by design Inc., it is provided with service synonymous with the company title—*food by design*. What is behind the name?

President Kimble Carter explains it this way:

"If there is a food necessity—no matter what it is—we can design a program to meet that need."

Kimble's food by design Inc. is based in LaGrange, Ga., serving a 70-mile radius which includes Newnan, Columbus and the Auburn/Opelika area. A veteran of more than two decades in the industry, Mr. Carter's original operation was purchased by Edenfield Food Service in 1980. The transaction contained a non-compete clause in vending but coffee service was not included. Mr. Carter created an OCS operation know as Kimble's Coffee & Bits. The expiration of the non-compete vending portion in later years allowed the operation to grow into full-line status.

And it has grown successfully. Today there is a workforce of 47 employees. Six routes service accounts in the territory and there are three manual cafeterias with on-site preparation augmenting the LaGrange commissary. A catering division handles projects as diverse as executive dining rooms to weddings. Products are sold and sent to prison inmates through a unique correctional services division. Food accounts for 33 percent of company volume of which 19 percent is vending and the remainder in cafeterias and vending.

In its food service marketing strategy, Kimble's emphasizes its "homemade appeal" which is geared to match the taste of the local market. The client roster is heavily industrial with blue-collar consumers.

"Our thrust is to the at-work location rather than attempting to create an away-from-home dining experience," Mr. Carter states. "Our consumers are looking for quality food at an economical price. This is what we

continued on page 16



KIMBELL CARTER grew an OCS business into a full-line operation comprising vended foodservice, cafeterias, catering and service to correctional institutions. Below, he discusses menu preparations with **KEN KUHN**, operations manager at the Wal-Mart distribution center in LaGrange, Ga., and **J. DAVID ELY**, Innovative Food Concepts, a Contributing Editor of *Vending & OCS*. Population at the Wal-Mart account numbers 900 workers.



are offering in vending where the highest price point is \$2.00."

The commissary produces 10,000 units weekly. Fresh eggs are basic to preparation, with chicken, tuna and egg salads its leading signature items. Frozen products are utilized as needed.

A manual menu reflects a different pricing structure as the home-made appeals still prevails. Over a

seven-day period, varieties offered by "Kimble's Kitchen" might be two whole catfish, hushpuppies, two sides and a drink (\$5.95); chopped BBQ (\$2.50); Beef Stroganoff with egg noodles (\$2.50); or BBQ leg quarters (\$2.00), among others. Combos of grilled chicken sandwich, meatball, hamburger and pizza are priced at \$3.75. Sides such as lima beans, fried okra, butter peas and scalloped

potatoes are priced at 80¢. A "Grab & Go Weekly Breakfast Special" consisting of a sausage biscuit, cheese grits and beverage, reduces a regular price to \$3.10 from \$1.99.

Extensive television advertising promotes catering and special events. Weddings are a prime specialty. "Kimble's Events By Design" provides a Step-By-Step Wedding Planning Guide. The opening page reads: "CONGRATULATIONS! You have made the most important decision of a lifetime and we want to wish you the very best as you begin the journey to making your dream wedding come true for you and your new fiancé. This guide has been carefully put together to give you the steps necessary and a timeline to accomplish your special day. At Kimble's we can provide you with an expert Wedding Planning to handle even the tiniest details. Our professional staff has handled over 500 weddings facilitating everything from the ceremony to the beautiful limo to go away in...so don't let the stress of all these details make you crazy, put everything in our hands and enjoy this special time! Remember Kimble's Events by Design can handle it all!" The guide does indeed cover all the minute details—beginning 12 months before to the wedding day. There are helpful hints on all arrangements along with suggestions on how to allocate costs.

Serving several thousand prison inmates has developed into an important segment of the overall operation. Mr. Carter developed software to implement the system. Allowable products ranging from snacks to toothpaste can be ordered. It is all computerized—the development of a pick list to be filled, prices and payment from an individual's money account held at the prison.

Overall, total company sales are ahead 23 percent thus far in 2007, but it's been the diversified activities which essentially are responsible for its growth. Vending volume is basically flat and is approximately the same as 2004 even though there have been only two lost accounts over the past nine years.

"As the industry has matured and with consolidation, it's now a real slugfest in our market," Mr. Carter says.

Still, full-line vending is the platform upon which this operation stands. Competition will continue to be challenged...by design. □



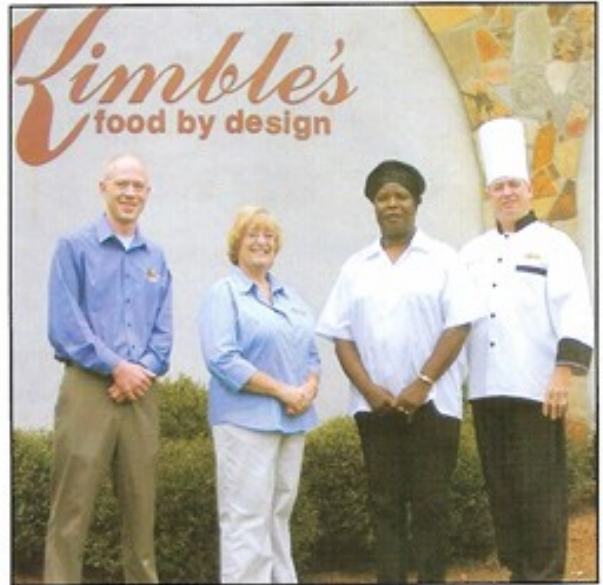
Freshly-prepared food items with a "homemade appeal" which cater to the preferences of its consumers are produced in a commissary with an output of 10,000 units weekly. A chicken salad sandwich is one of the operation's signature products



Picturing The Team That Makes It Happen



Administration



Special Event Catering



Vending Route Sales and Service



Commissary



Cafeteria Service



Correctional Services