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Food Service Technology Center Celebrates 25th Anniversary

Debi Kensell

In 2010, RFMA began a partnership with Don Fisher and Richard Young at the Food Service Technology Center to develop and present content at our annual meeting. Now we can't imagine a conference without them.

When it comes to restaurant energy efficiency, they are the industry gurus. Their passion for research and their excitement for sharing that information are transforming the way restaurants consider equipment efficiency. When they invited RFMA to their 25th anniversary celebration, we were excited to attend to show our mutual support. Today, the FSTC is the nation's leading resource for commercial foodservice energy-efficiency information. It's truly amazing when you consider its humble beginnings.

Twenty-five years ago, Bettie Jean Davis was an Executive Account Manager of Food Service at PG&E (Pacific Gas & Electric). She had a dream to lower the energy consumption of commercial kitchens and started working toward that goal by setting up a test kitchen site. Bettie convinced Carl Weinberg, the Vice President of Research and Development at PG&E, at the time, to fund the operation.

In 1987 Don Fisher and Judy Nickel were the primary technical consultants/researchers on the project, with engineering support from PG&E's Technical and Ecological Services. Soon thereafter Bettie hired Gloria Pieretti as the on-site manager for the Production-Test Kitchen program. In total, there were three FTE people dedicated to the program at the time. Today's team consists of 22 people. Bettie has retired from PG&E but continues to do freelance consulting work as principal of Davis Project Management. Her primary client is EPRI (Electric Power Research Institute). To witness the reality of what has evolved from that initial dream is indeed a reason to celebrate!

The symposium and celebration took place over three days with more than 200 attendees from across the United States, Canada and Mexico. The focus of the conference was a look to the future—what's next with regard to refrigeration, dishwashers and cooking equipment, along with a great discussion on the Kitchen of the Future.

"[It was a] great opportunity to hear about the latest research in sustainability relative to food service equipment," said Dorothy Cudia, Director of Purchasing at DARDEN. "The second day gave us the opportunity to tour both the Food Service Technology Center and the PG&E testing facility. The conference provided practical information, hands-on demonstrations and the ability to network with industry leaders. I brought back several ideas that are viable for my organization."

Dinner was hosted at Bridges, a restaurant located in Danville, Calif., that recently completed a major energy-efficient retrofit with the help of the center. They installed a new ice machine that produces more ice but uses less energy and reduces operating costs by shifting ice production to overnight hours when energy is cheaper. They also changed the lighting throughout the restaurant, including the kitchen, bar and dining room; installed high-efficiency evaporator fan motors and a controller in the walk-in freezer; and added new convection ovens and fryers that cook faster and use up to 40 percent less energy.

Perhaps most important, the center was able to obtain a before-and-after report of the restaurant's energy use that will be studied and shared with other business customers to show the benefits.

Don Fisher would often say "You should come out to San Ramon and see our facility; it would all make sense then!" After spending a few days with the team at FSTC, it makes perfect sense.

We can say without a doubt that no organization has had a more positive impact on the foodservice equipment

and supplies business than the Food Service Technology Center. Starting with Bettie's dream while at Pacific Gas & Electric, and managed by Don Fisher and Judy Nickel since its founding, the FSTC painstakingly created the foundation for the scientific analysis of foodservice equipment and facilities efficiency and performance. Now providing technical support to the other investor-owned utilities in California—Southern California Gas, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric, in addition to PG&E—it continues to push the envelope every day. Even though FSTC is located in California and works with the California utilities companies, they are an international resource available to restaurants all over the world.

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