



EzOABjjW

University of Montana

Entry details

Entry Name:	The Lodge Dining Center
Institution Name:	University of Montana
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Trail Bundy, Assistant Director, Strategic Marketing

Planning for The Lodge focused on redefining how dining functions within student life. The goal was to move beyond a traditional model and create a space designed for movement, flexibility, and connection. The approach combined student input, campus planning priorities, and site conditions to guide decision-making. Inspired by the Clark Fork River, circulation and layout were developed to reduce congestion and support natural gathering. The selected site, positioned between housing and the academic core, established the dining hall as a central part of daily campus life, designed to serve nearly 3,000 guests per day across multiple dining concepts.

Essay:

Planning began with identifying limitations of the existing Food Zoo, including congestion, inefficient circulation, and limited flexibility. Student and stakeholder feedback included 353 survey responses with a 90% completion rate. Feedback emphasized menu variety, dietary options including vegan and allergen-friendly meals, locally sourced food, and a space that supports communal dining. Students identified the need for multiple food stations, visible food preparation, and a layout that allows movement and choice.

The project aligned with the university's Student Life Master Plan, which identified a new dining hall as a priority to support recruitment and student experience. Site selection placed the building between residential housing, academic buildings, and the Oval, requiring the removal of the Lommasson Center.

Design was guided by the Clark Fork River. Circulation paths create continuous movement with defined gathering points, reducing bottlenecks and supporting interaction. The program was structured around seven micro-restaurants, informed by early concept planning prioritizing flexibility across cuisines and service styles.

The design incorporated elements such as a Mongolian grill, outdoor seating with views of the Oval and Mount Sentinel, a floor-to-ceiling fireplace, microgreens grown on-site, and a mural. In January 2025, the facility achieved LEED Gold certification.

Introduction:

Marketing for The Lodge focused on establishing identity and connection. The goal was to introduce a dining hall grounded in Montana and positioned as a shared space for students. Communication included signage, concept identity, RiseVision displays, and digital content distributed across campus. Outreach extended into the Missoula community through radio and television advertising, as well as in-person engagement, to support hiring and raise awareness. The building opened in August 2024 under accelerated conditions following a regional storm with recorded wind speeds of 109 mph that caused widespread outages, necessitating immediate activation to serve the campus population.

Essay:

Marketing focused on storytelling and identity. Venue names were introduced with their historical and cultural significance, including Yow & Yee, developed in recognition of Butte's Pekin Noodle Parlor, the oldest continuously operating Chinese restaurant in the United States. Other concepts reflected Montana's people, industries, and communities, reinforcing the dining hall's grounding in place.

Communication included RiseVision displays, on-site signage, a pre-opening drone video, and paid media through television and radio advertising promoting both the dining hall and employment opportunities. Dining leadership conducted construction tours for ASUM student groups, campus leadership, and community partners to introduce the space prior to opening.

The Lodge opened earlier than planned following a regional storm with recorded wind speeds of 109 mph that caused widespread outages across Missoula. Dining operations were immediately activated, serving 1,123 guests on the first day and 1,140 the next, including students and community members involved in cleanup efforts. Hot meals were available by dinner service due to backup power and full production capability .

2,008 incoming students, families, and campus partners attended Campus Dining's welcome banquet. The opening ceremony included a bread breaking led by University President Seth Bodnar, reinforcing the dining hall as a shared space.

Introduction:

The Lodge required coordination across campus and the community. Planning, design, operations, and staffing involved students, dining staff, housing, facilities, administration, and external partners. Student feedback directly informed priorities regarding variety, flexibility, and space utilization, while dining staff shaped the kitchen layout and service flow. The scale of the project required new approaches to hiring, including expanded community recruitment and campus-wide coordination with Human Resource Services. Design teams worked alongside operations to align concept placement, equipment, and circulation. The result is a dining hall shaped by multiple stakeholders and supported by coordinated execution across campus and community.

Essay:

Collaboration-informed planning, design, and operations. Input was collected from students, resident assistants, dining staff, housing, facilities, and university leadership. Students identified priorities including variety, flexibility, and mixed-use space. Dining staff identified operational challenges, including inefficient layout and service flow.

Design teams translated this input into a layout that supported circulation, visibility, and multiple service points. Concept placement, kitchen adjacency, and seating zones were developed through cross-team coordination.

Staffing required a new approach. The Lodge required the largest hiring effort in Campus Dining history. Recruitment expanded into the Missoula community through local media, television, and radio outreach, and direct engagement.

In partnership with HR, the university hosted its first campus-wide career fair for dining and operational roles. The event supported multiple departments and included construction tours to introduce the facility. Additional outreach included participation in community events such as Out to Lunch and the Clark Fork Farmers Market.

Following the opening, annual transaction volume increased from approximately 372,000 in the previous dining hall to over 626,000 in The Lodge’s first year. Meal volume increased by 46%, off-campus meal plan participation increased by 125%, and the facility served its one millionth customer on February 4, 2026, demonstrating sustained use and adoption.

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Promo Drone Launch Vi...

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Lodge Dining Center Re...

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Attachment name
Website

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Menu

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Lodge Sustainability

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