

Sustainability Kick Off - As Welcoming As a Warm Cookie!

Montclair State University

Introduction:

At the crossroads of sustainability and food service lies a common challenge: reducing food waste. To capture the sentiment of a conference intended to kickoff the establishment of a new Office of Sustainability, this menu featured food that was captured before the landfill – creatively reborn to serve the expansive palates of our guests.

Essay:

Hearty Shakshuka – sunny cage-free eggs nestled in a spicy North African inspired tomato sauce, topped with crispy onions took center stage. Satisfied guest appetites remained free of the most common dietary restrictions of gluten and dairy.

Oatmeal and Grain Carrot Cake Parfaits offered a sweet, smooth contrast with repurposed oats and grains folded with fresh cream beneath salvaged, candied carrot peel and golden mango compote.

A familiar breakfast favorite was reimagined into a French Toast Bread Pudding using reclaimed bread. Cast-off bananas were baked into a perfectly balanced warm, comforting casserole featuring hints of vanilla, cinnamon, with a satisfying, buttery undertone.

Recycled Coffee Cookies employed a unique twist, coffee grounds to convey bitterness reminiscent of a morning roast – synergizing with the sweetness of the chocolate and hints of sea salt. The slight crunch of the cookie's edges, combined with

the soft, chewy center, makes for a satisfying contrast against the smooth melt of the chocolate chips. The coffee grounds also add a bit of texture and give the cookie a more rustic feel.

Guests awakened their palates with sips from hydration stations born of reclaimed herbs and fruits– sage blueberry, watermelon mint, Granny Smith apple and celery.

#### Introduction:

Finely tuned catering events require perfect timing, hyper-focused customer service, well-trained staff, and a bounty of palate-pleasing entrees served at the perfect temperature often in an off-site location. Now imagine all of the above plus the innovative mission to kick off a highly visible new department with the lofty responsibility of transitioning a twenty-four thousand student population and every single campus department to sustainably green pathways.

#### Essay:

The Director of Campus Sustainability, Office of the President, envisioned a collaboration with our catering team to show the entire University how delicious going green can be. Assisting the catering department was staff from our eco-friendly dining hall and Campus Registered Dietitian - covering allergen needs. The team met to digest the event's mission - a fancy, sit-down catered breakfast event at the intersection of sustainable and delicious with a side of empowering 'how-to' education. Lecture presentations on sustainability during the event included our resident Celebrity Chef, Jehangir Mehta, who features strongly in sustainability arenas, and our Director of Wellness and Dining, Jennifer Bostedo, RDN. Highlighting the sustainability measures we have already undertaken in our inaugural year on campus, our eco-friendly purchasing and production standards were discussed. As a demonstration of our efforts to control food waste, the menu featured commonly discarded items given new life. Production methods were shared as well as recipes. Participants were eager to take away knowledge for how they might implement more sustainable foodways at home and on campus. An upcycled coffee ground cookie recipe they experienced was a sweet reminder that sustainable can be as easy as a morning cup of joe!

#### Introduction:

What if the menu that drives your event was dependent on what you could glean across campus? Production that begins weeks ahead of time with a set menu and shopping list to meet client needs now refocused to "What can we upcycle into something else without sacrificing food safety?" Instead of wasteful flowers and decor, a minimalist aesthetic of items were given a second life. Instead of just pulling a recipe to give to the cook, our Director coordinated and persuaded over five different chefs and their busy campus operations to contribute to the event.

#### Essay:

Compost, trash or upcycled treasure? Items like bruised bananas, day-old bread, spent coffee grounds, left over tomato sauce, roasted veggies, and more become a prized commodity. Many of these items needed to be gathered in small quantities and frozen to maintain quality as adequate quantities were gathered across campus kitchens in the weeks leading up to the event.

Table scape must be mindful of the goal of the event and so featured a minimalist approach and only decorative reusable trivets and linen, letting the food truly shine. Teatulia, an organic and sustainable tea brand and eco-friendly Sun Coffee in our drink service proved that morning sips can easily be sustainable choices. The buzz at the back of the catering hall, however, belonged to the Hydration Station. Filtered tap water infused with cast off herbs and fruits brought interest to the tall pillars of refreshment that were a self-serve talk of the town.

#### Introduction:

Most of us generate more planet-warming emissions from eating than we do from driving or flying. Food production now accounts for about a fifth of total greenhouse gas emissions annually, which means that agriculture contributes more than any other sector, including energy and transportation, to climate change." – Amanda Little, author of *The Fate of Food: What We'll Eat in a Bigger, Hotter, Smarter World*

This quote symbolizes everything we must consider as food service operators on a daily basis. Make great food, make it local despite a North Eastern locale, make enough...but not too much to create waste!

Essay:

Building this collaboration with a new Campus Sustainability Office was a great chance to flex our eco-friendly muscles for the whole campus to see, learn and taste! The entire food cost of this event was \$379.50 dollars for 125 people. Gleaning, donations, and repurposing food destined for the trash made food cost a dream. Being able to support our new campus colleague in the Office of Sustainability in accelerating the campus move to further green initiatives was priceless. Participants were wowed by the smell of freshly baked Coffee Grind Cookies and refreshed by the cool creaminess of upcycled oatmeal compote. What was once overlooked—leftover oats, coffee grinds, and frozen mango—suddenly became the center of attention that day. The hydration station water towers proved to be a gathering hub as guests buzzed about what leftover veggies they had in their fridge that could be repurposed to impress when they entertained at home. As a guest lecturer, we had the chance to share our enhanced purchasing sustainability measures to show we are always serious about our planet friendliness. Our client was so pleased with the event and its positive feedback that he intends to make it a yearly event.

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