

Celebrating Lunar New Year

Penn State University

Introduction:

Penn State Dining's Lunar New Year dinner brought our students and campus community together to learn more about the festivities and food traditions in this celebration. Care was taken to include traditionally eaten foods while incorporating elements important to Asian celebrations marking the arrival of spring and beginning of a new year. Attention to these details were carried through the menu and into the décor at each of the five dining areas and guests enjoyed learning more about unfamiliar traditions and symbolism of food and décor during Lunar New Year.

Essay:

The menu for the evening included a wide variety of foods important in Asian culture and included entrees such as Szechuan short ribs, steamed cod, and home-style tofu stir-fry. Sides to complement included vegetable lo mein, jasmine rice, stir-fry green beans with sesame and a VERY popular dim sum bar. A special beverage--strawberry fruit tea with popping boba-- and sweet dessert offerings--including almond cookies and cupcakes with edible Year of the Snake medallions-- rounded out the expansive menu.

Colorful fruit displays mirrored the brightly colored decorations, symbolic elements representing good luck and prosperity in Lunar New Year celebrations. A balanced variety of items was designed for all guests and menu information cards provided allergy and dietary preference information carried the theme for the event. Food preparations included steamed, grilled and fried items and temperatures and quality were carefully monitored throughout the meal.

Introduction:

The Lunar New Year dinner event was developed to honor Asian culture and to bring communities together in learning about this important tradition celebrating spring and a new year. Full-time and student staff members representing Asian communities along with those who loved to learn more about these traditions were very eager to share their knowledge and what they had learned to help bring traditional elements to life for our guests.

Essay:

Lunar New Year was a very popular theme for smaller scale pop up events so the planning team knew it would be very popular as a campus-wide special dinner. Lunar New Year also offered a great opportunity to share more about Asian culture and traditions, especially through theming of décor and the menu. Management teams in each dining area planned extensively and transformed the dining area with bright red linens, lucky symbols like gold coins, bamboo and red lanterns. Nods to the Year of the Snake were front and center through marketing, special pins and even the cupcakes!

The meal was served utilizing a variety of methods including in traditional hot and cold wells along with bamboo steamer baskets, a dim sum bar offering a variety of small bites and well-spaced full-service buffet areas. The dinner event was carefully laid out to replicate popular stations and draw guests to multiple areas and help with the flow of service and enhance the overall dinner experience.

Introduction:

By design, the Lunar New Year dinner event was going to be special! The dinner was advertised throughout the semester and more frequently in the month prior, ensuring that students and the campus community could plan to attend. Menu details and hours were communicated on cohesive and brightly coordinated marketing materials carrying the Year of the Snake theming utilized in print materials, digital marketing and interactive social media to engage students before, during, and after the dinner.

Essay:

Bright red marketing pieces featuring the Year of the Snake were utilized in a variety of communication channels including on social media, digital signage, print signage, and large promotional menu banners. Internal staff communication and a university-wide press release utilized the same design elements for increased visibility and recognition. Social media communication increased as the event drew closer and gave students a sneak peek of the menu and décor. Instagram stories covered the event across all five locations throughout the evening to feature the festive menu and luck-bringing décor. Cross promotion with the central Penn State Instagram account along with a wrap-up post on LinkedIn also promoted the dinner event and expanded the audience and reach of marketing efforts.

High guest satisfaction and positive feedback via internal surveying and social media engagement both support a repeat or standing Lunar New Year dinner event in the future. Guest feedback and photos from each area were shared on the back of the house screens sharing appreciation for all of the teams' planning and hard work necessary to execute such a wonderful dinner event.

Introduction:

Lunar New Year was the first of two special dinners for the spring semester and students were wowed with the transformation of the dining spaces in all five of our dining commons buffets. Months of planning translated to a delicious dinner and beautifully decorated space, perfect for honoring the time-honored traditions of Asian culture. The campus community embraced the opportunity to learn and share and will result in valuable partnerships for future collaboration. The dinner was well attended by students and staff with an overall increase in average weekday attendance of nearly 20%.

Essay:

When the team decided on the Lunar New Year dinner, it was very important to create an authentic experience that honored and celebrated Asian traditions. This was achieved by carefully curating the menu to incorporate traditional lucky foods such as good fortune fruit displays, steamed cod symbolizing prosperity and noodles representing happiness and longevity. The menu was then enhanced by symbolic décor—flowers representing renewal, red tablecloths and décor representing good fortune and joy and finally elements of gold representing wealth and prosperity in the new year. The team then turned their focus to small details like coordinating name tags, symbolism through numbers and elements and carefully arranged displays.

In total, our dining areas welcomed 5,206 students and guests for dinner—19.3% more students and guests than a typical dinner service! More importantly we are uniquely positioned in college dining to share with our guests a different cultural experience that might differ from their own—building community by sharing a special evening celebrating the Lunar New Year.

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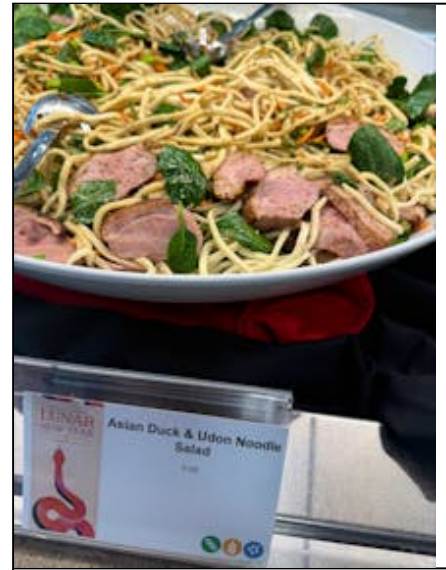
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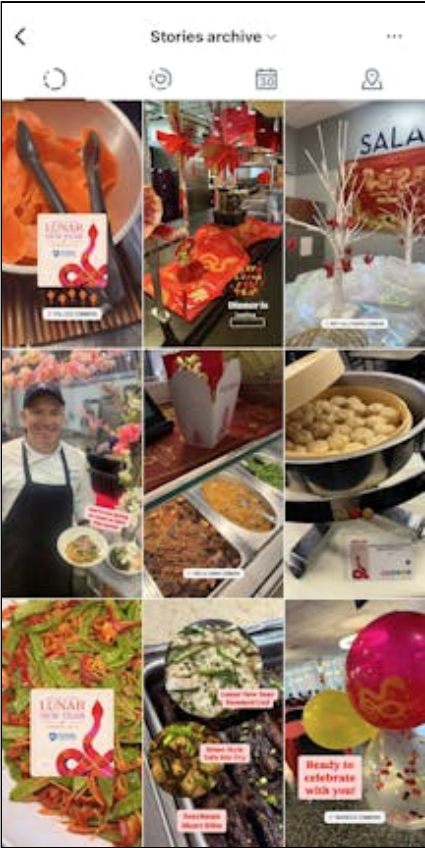
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