

Rhode Island School of Design Gives Back to the Providence Community through CARES Program

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Dining Services serves roughly 3,500 meals a day in five separate dining units. RISD's foundation is dedication to good design combined with a commitment to the local community.

In the fall of 2006, RISD's sustainability program was formalized when staff and enthusiastic students came up with the title "CARES." The CARES program stands for community, action, responsibility, environment and sustainability. The CARES program pledged to use products and practices that have minimal environmental impact, to source locally produced foods and food products whenever possible, to reduce energy consumption and solid waste by 3 percent each year, and to be a positive presence at RISD and throughout the Providence community.



RISD discovered an innovative way to simultaneously keep Rhode Island forests beautiful while decreasing dependency on foreign energy sources and getting dinner cooked. Most institutional dining services use natural gas for creating grilled pizzas, but at RISD's MET Dining Hall, harvested wood from Rhode Island forests is used in the pizza oven.

Also helping to reduce energy usage at RISD is an internal steam system. A steam source heats dormitories and classrooms across campus in addition to powering the steam kettles and convection steam ovens. Drawing from a pre-existing heat source is far more efficient, and RISD is essentially using "pre-used" heat.

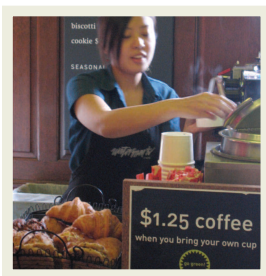
In order to reduce water consumption, RISD installed a Hobart Opti-Rinse™ System FT900 warewasher. This system cuts water use by as much as 50 percent while reducing associated sanitary sewer costs and energy used to heat the water. Additionally, RISD is currently switching the cooling system in the

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walk-in refrigerators from a water-based system to chemical-based system. By June of 2008, the refrigerators will be cooled without the use of water. The latest water-saving effort at RISD is the creation of water foundations. Designs are in the works for fountains that let students use non-disposable containers at on-site water foundations, essentially replacing disposable water bottles.

Through recycling, RISD hopes to reduce solid-waste creation by the aforementioned 3 percent each year. At all campus dining units, customers find well-maintained bins for the disposal of plastic, paper, glass and non-recyclable products. The color-coded bins make recycling a constant presence in people's lives across campus. RISD expects to reduce solid waste generation by a factor of two.

RISD has also established a program called Mug-It-Up to encourage students to bring mugs to use in the MET Dining Hall. When students bring in a mug, they are rewarded with free refills on all drinks. They can also donate as many mugs as they wish. So far, this program has been a success. Students typically donate more than one mug to the program, and the sense of community connection grows as students recognize their donated mugs around campus.



Through the Mug-It-Up program, RISD reduced solid waste generation by approximately 2.5 tons per year. In addition to this program, students are also encouraged to participate in the Cold Beverage Program. Students can save 20 percent at designated dining halls by bringing their own non-disposable containers. To publicize the program, RISD provides one refillable beverage bottle to each freshman when he or she arrives on campus.

In addition, RISD Dining Services is reducing waste with the use of ecological cups, to-go containers and flatware. Groundwork is currently being laid for a small-scale composting program to run in conjunction with the local farmers-vendors. When participating farmers make food deliveries, they will also pick up a compost bin for on-farm composting.

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In order to source locally produced goods whenever possible, the CARES program worked to create a direct relationship with farmers and food producers. CARES knows that direct connections help farmers and small businesses gain more of the food dollar. Healthy economies mean RISD will have a secure source of fresh food.



RISD also worked closely with the nonprofit organization Farm Fresh Rhode Island to allow farmers to update information online on what they are growing and where they sell. RISD Dining Services will now be able to find out what is in season and how to find it. Though this online service is in its infancy, it holds great potential for simplifying logistics of local purchasing for RISD and others in the community.



Currently, RISD's local purchasing revolves around five core farmers and a cooperative. They work to ensure each dining unit has at least one locally grown item featured each day. Additionally, to increase awareness of local purchasing on campus, an annual 100-Mile Meal is hosted at the institution. The meal is in early November and coincides with a Thanksgiving-style feast. The goal of the meal is to purchase as much from near by farmers and food producers as possible.

Financially, the widespread initiatives have reaped large benefits. Estimated savings include \$8,000 to \$12,000 per year from the Internal Steam System; \$5,600 annually from the Hobart warewasher; \$8,000 per year from the water-free cooling system and \$100 per menu cycle from the assistance of Farm Fresh Rhode Island. Solid waste savings vary among the different efforts. The well-maintained recycling bins save 1.5 tons of waste per year, and the Mug-It-Up and Cold Beverage Program saves 1.5 to 2 tons of waste per year.