



Decorative fountains and chocolate-covered pretzels grace Lenoir on March 4. Carolina Dining Services offers special dinners at least once per month.

Theme dinners spice up meals

Options cost campus dining more

BY DAVID GILMORE
STAFF WRITER

The counters of UNC's dining halls were spread with shrimp, fried oysters, clams and fish March 4.

Tartar sauce took the place of ketchup, and a fancy sundae bar replaced the smoothie stand.

This was not the average night at Lenoir or Rams Head dining halls.

In fact, the special dinner is something Carolina Dining Services officials do at least once a month in an effort to give students a break from the monotony of wraps, burgers and barbecue.

"I wasn't expecting Lenoir to have food the quality that they had," sophomore Ryan Johnson said. "It was a good way to spice things up."

But the cost of preparing these meals makes them too expensive for the dining halls to put them on every day, despite some student interest in the idea.

"Quite often at these themed meals, they'll feature an upscale, pricier product," said Scott Myers, director of food and vending. "We

just can't afford to serve steak or shrimp every night, but it's a way to get students some upscale items within a reasonable cost."

The March 4 meal cost an estimated \$6,000 more than regular days — though it should be noted that it is the most expensive of the theme meals.

"There's usually a 10 to 20 percent increase," said Fred Bissinger, district manager for Aramark Corp. The total price of entrees at both dining halls usually runs at \$3,000 per day, so a special day costs between \$3,300 and \$3,600, on average.

Officials said taking the money used to make the theme meals and spreading it out throughout 30 days would not produce noticeable changes in food quality.

But some students still say they wish for more variety in the everyday offerings at the campus dining halls.

"It'd be nice to have something different some of the time," sophomore Jordan Wilson said.

Rams Head and Lenoir dining halls' main competitor, The Agora at Granville Towers, also

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SCOTT MYERS, DIRECTOR OF FOOD AND VENDING

offers theme meals about once a month.

"(Students) do seem to enjoy them a lot," said Kelly Stafko, director of dining services at The Agora. She added that events such as the State Fair dinner are especially popular among the students.

Although the dining halls do not count student attendance at special dinners, dining officials said all three locations see an increase in student attendees on the theme dinner nights. Rams Head and Lenoir usually serve between 6,000 and 7,000 meals per day, and The Agora hosts about 2,000 students daily.

"If you eat (dining hall food) two or three times a day, seven or eight times a week, it gets sometimes

routine," Bissinger said. "Those special events break up that routine."

Past theme meals included Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners featured last semester and a Valentine's Day theme in February.

And all three dining halls provide everyday specials that are not part of the theme meals. A banana split bar at Lenoir in February and a "chocolate extravaganza" at The Agora have proved popular with students.

The next theme meal, the Culinary Showcase, will be March 27 at both Lenoir and Rams Head facilities.

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Vegetarian Forum will be held on March 18 in Lenoir Mainstreet

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