

Canisius Dining
By Robert Creenan and CJ Gates

Over the course of the class of 2016's time at Canisius, the dining options on campus have noticeably improved. Most visibly present are the healthy vegetarian and vegan options available at all dining establishments. While some students in the past have complained about the lack of bringing new options, now Chartwells, the provider of campus food, is willing to comply and change the offerings on a few weeks notice. Has the student demand simply been greater or is Chartwells only now willing to listen?

The Chartwells' Meetings

On March 17, Hannah Flynn, the chairman of the Undergraduate Student Association's dining services committee, met with John Tychinski, the director of dining services at Canisius, Gary Lew, the director of campus purchasing, and Matt Mulville, the director of student life, for their usual bi-weekly meeting at the Dugan conference room next to Student Life. Tychinski and Lew were hoping to get the meeting over with quick since it's St. Patrick's day and they were eager to get good Irish food once they leave for the day.

Tychinski first brings up his points to Flynn on what Chartwells' plans are. As the last full month of the Spring semester gets underway, Chartwells is going start putting up posters for how many meal blocks and Griffbucks students should have remaining. Sales for the On the Go program, which are portable healthy options, have been phenomenal, having to restock the fridges in Science Hall 3 times this week and making \$1800. There is a reported spike of sales in the Old Main cafe between 3-6 pm, usually for students getting out of classes in at that time. The Dining Hall's numbers are down overall this semester, mainly during lunch hours. On St. Patrick's Day, Shamrock Shakes were offered, and Chartwells is looking into adding more healthy smoothies, such as Kale, and using Vitamix blenders for them. They're looking into giving travelling athletes healthier food options for when they play road games, starting with protein snack packs. Following through on this would require funds from the athletic department budget. Students should also expect price increases at Subway and Tim Horton's due to the state's new minimum wage increase.

After Tychinski got what he wanted to say out of the way, Hannah started bringing up student concerns. Subway and Starbucks aren't accepting gift cards, which Tychinski explained Subway doesn't have the tech for it and the campus Starbucks isn't a fully-fledged franchise. The options listed for the dining hall on the campus dining website have been reported as inconsistent with what is being served. Some of the options have been seen to be too similar to each other, with a weeknight dinner having 2 pasta options one time. A dinner on a Sunday had all chicken options. The meals the dining hall served on St. Patrick's Day were all Irish themed, which people who don't celebrate the holiday will not want.

A major point Flynn brought up was the Dining Hall has not always followed through on Meatless Monday, a notable concern given the amount of advertising being done to promote it. She gave reports of some shifts not having a vegetarian

option at all. There were mentions of students asking for a vegetarian burger and ending up with a turkey burger and having goat cheese in one offering which was supposed to be vegan.

Students were also complaining of some of the chefs being too slow to serve food, including one in particular named Ebony. Tychinski defended her by saying she's shy, and takes a while to normally talk to people, implying she may have a mental disability. Another chef, Andrea, is very talkative among the other chefs and students whenever she prepares food. Tychinski said Chartwells has a goal of getting students their food faster in around 7 minutes, down from the 10-12 minute range.

The student senate passed a resolution last semester for the campus to ban styrofoam, most commonly used for food containers. Tychinski brought up how they still haven't found a suitable styrofoam replacement for Iggy's yet, the only place on campus that still uses styrofoam containers. He mentions how students don't always keep reusable plastic containers in sanitary conditions if rented out for the entire semester or year. The idea of biodegradable plates at Iggy's is discussed, but the food grease would potentially ruin them from the time food is served to the student sitting down at a table. Other Iggy's topics mentioned are no one is currently manning the Iggy's bar all the time, due to the low alcohol sales and the idea of having breakfast at Iggy's as an alternative to the dining hall.

The group also talked about the results of their Secret Shopper Program, where students are paid to secretly evaluate the staff and dining experience at Iggy's and the Dining Hall. The results were published anonymously on a spreadsheet. Most of the comments were short and positive, with the occasional elaboration stating either how good or poor the service was. This program will resume when school starts back up once spring break is over.

Tychinski ended the meeting saying he wants to attend the next possible senate meeting to address any concerns they may have. The Senate wants to talk to him mainly about any proposed renovations to the campus dining facilities.

The Student's Voice

Flynn acts as the liaison between the students and Chartwells executive board. She's been on the committee since the beginning of the school year, which is also her first year as a senator. She initially wasn't interested in being a representative for anything since it's her first year on senate until she talked to Executive Vice President Elias Ayoub about it. He mentioned dining services still needed someone to fill their representative position.

"I thought that it was interesting because I'm also an RA in Bosch, so the freshman there give me input on dining matters all the time," Flynn said. "Here at Canisius, you can directly have an effect on campus. It's pretty exciting. So I took the job with open arms."

When Flynn first came to Canisius as a freshman, she was personally a vegetarian. The food situation at the time made it hard for her to continue that. "I would go to dinner in the dining hall and three places would have chicken, two places would serve beef and I would be like, 'This is ridiculous. All I can eat is salad,'" Flynn said.

The relationship between Chartwells and the senate wasn't as good as it is now. They were unresponsive to student concerns, mainly to what Alex Valvo, in charge of the Dining Services committee last year, would bring up to them. She's not entirely sure why they're being so responsive now, but the relationship between Chartwells and the senate became notably better when they asked Tatiana Cruz, a former senator, to be on the action committee, part of the group that renegotiated Chartwells' contract with Canisius last year.

Flynn always encourages her board members to go out to dinner or have breakfast at a Chartwells location and get a gist of what they don't have, and what they should have. Actively go out into the student body and ask their opinion about food on campus. "A lot of freshman are on the committee, which I'm happy for since freshman have the meal plans with the most meal blocks," Flynn said. Vegans and vegetarians are on the committee too, who will have the ideas for bringing in wheat wraps and brown rice. Specific people include Luke McCoy, Julia Kohler, Annalyse Paulson, Alex Valvo, Tamara Miskovic, Jeffrey Wilson, and Steve Kawalerski.

Chartwells' response to change varies from situation to situation, with this year in particular being very responsive to concerns. They've exceeded all of Flynn's expectations in being vegan and vegetarian friendly. Sometimes there's lashback to some plans, like how senate is trying to get reusable cups right now. Subway and Zmato are a lot faster, and Iggy's management has been fantastic. "Ken has been doing great things at Iggy's," Flynn said. "He's very responsive to kids saying, 'Can we get this on the menu?' 'Sure, why not?' Someone would bring up the idea of Irish Milk and he's like 'Let's do it!'"

"With Dining services, it isn't like the sustainability committee where whatever you want to do, you can do," Flynn said. "Dining services has a lot of pushback from administration and Chartwells since they can't just do anything willy nilly. There are a lot of aspects you have to think about before surging forward."

For the rest of the semester, Dining Services is worried about making dining a better experience than it is and make so that people don't get upset with Chartwells anymore. After the secret shopper program finishes up, they might put out a survey for the student body to see what they did right/wrong and come up with top priorities for next year. Chartwells really wants to help the Senate with their student run coffee shop proposal where the Streetside Cafe used to be underneath the student center.

Chartwells and Canisius' Upper Management

Chartwells manages the dining on campuses nationwide, but they're also part of a worldwide company called Compass Group. A very large corporation with a lot of college accounts, they also manage corporate dining and secondary schools. Chartwells came to Canisius during a bidding situation, where many companies were interviewed. Many of the companies that bid against Chartwells have since ended up merging with each other.

Signed our first contract with Chartwells in 1998. The contracts last 5 years, just signed a new one last year. Contracts used to be longer, but they decided 5 was long enough. "We felt that Chartwells was doing a good job and pointing in the right

direction,” said Lew. “We don’t do the formal thing all the time, we’re still looking at the competition too.”

Chartwells reports to Lew, whom he manages for Marco Benedetti. He manages contracts for campus dining, the bookstore, vending companies, and the print shop. He has been on student dining committee for as long as he can remember.

Many people have input as to what Chartwells can or should change; all the way through student affairs and Terri Mangione. But ultimately, it's Marco Benedetti's decision. “Anything with Chartwells is financial when you get down to it,” Lew said. “We come to conclusions as a group, so there’s not one person who says ‘Do this, do that.’ We let the students know what’s happening, so we’re all on the same page.”

Mulville has run the Secret Shopper program on his own because he’s closely connected with the students and can recruit people to do that work more readily than Lew can. The bookstore does the same thing where they hire students to secretly buy things when they go in in order to test the staff. “We want to hear feedback, because that’s how we gauge what’s going on,” Lew said, as he will walk around and observe what’s happening, like going into a kitchen unannounced and see what’s happening. “The function of the dining committee is to give students feedback. We depend on students to give their suggestions or complaints. A complaint is not a bad thing. Sometimes, something needs correction. It has a foundation in something.”

“Canisius is open to criticism,” Lew said, “We’ll take that and run with it. If the students were complaining about something, it would be silly not to fix it. You’re like our customers. Employees give feedback too on the dining hall or different food venues. Their considerations are different from students, like if something isn’t made good or doesn’t taste right or they don’t like the preparation or presentation, but they’re still valid.”

Canisius pays Chartwells to run the dining, because Canisius isn’t in the dining business. It’s certainly is a necessary thing if you have resident students or commuter diners, so you hire companies that are experts at that and let them do their jobs. “There’s a budget and certain expectations that come with any contract,” Lew said. “You hold them to those expectations. We’re not bad guys, but there’s a constant dialogue back and forth between dining services and administration, and it can be at different levels, between Matt, Terri, and Marco. We’re not different from any company trying to run a business.”