

Comments to Resident Council, 3/13/2018

Concerning Dining Room Food Service

As I did last month, I continue to applaud Chef Jordan and his crew for their diverse menu offerings and fine food preparation serving a large number of people with varied dietary requirements and expectations. Bravo!

In stark contrast, the food service is less than satisfactory. Most of us, I believe, are understanding of and sympathetic to the difficulties of hiring and maintaining sufficient wait staff. Having observed the situation now for six weeks, I have come to believe that our difficulties have less to do with the number of people and more to do with communications, management and training.

This certainly requires a collaborative and respectful spirit between residents and wait staff alike. As it is now, residents are trying to be responsive to the perceived difficulties of the wait staff by continually shifting their patterns of eating to make it easier for the servers. This is not recognized or reciprocated and the problems worsen. Using breakfast as an example, residents are arriving earlier and earlier in order to have coffee and fruit (prunes/peaches) with their breakfast. Now, one needs to arrive by 6:45 to have a chance at either. The upshot is conflicts with servers put upon (or purportedly untrained) to set out more fruit — and, worse, elderly folks are tilting the coffee urns to get whatever coffee might be remaining. When a server adds an additional pot to the urn, usually after 7:00, the urn is immediately drained by waiting residents. This is unsafe and unnecessary if the residents are truly the priority.

The “express tables” has been an interesting experiment that I have tried to support daily over the course of the past month. I suspect that the experiment will be deemed a failure though I believe that it could succeed with some tweaking, including better communications and training. Among the issues:

- The servers were not trained for express service and never bought in to the concept. They were put upon and conveyed that to the residents
- On more than one occasion, servers brought out the wrong meal (that is something other than what was on the express menu)
- On other occasions the weekly express menu differed in details from the menu on the table and yet again from what was served.
- The initial response to any question was that residents at the express tables had to take what was served — well, yes and no
- Desserts seemed to be a “fatal” flaw, particularly with respect to ice cream. Folks would not eat at the tables due to ice cream which residents could not get if not explicitly on the menu and which would melt when presented with the entire meal
- The morning coffee cart — when it came around — came to the express table last. This made no sense whatsoever, particularly with the difficulty getting coffee at 7:00 anyhow
- Some residents have complained that the express tables were counterproductive insofar as they appeared intended to “force” people to turn over tables and further delaying service to others by being given priority. I do not believe this to be true, but it certainly is a perception increasing tension in the dining rooms

Each of these issues should be fairly easy to resolve with improved communications, management and training. Other suggestions might also be considered. One resident posed to me the possibility that one table might be designated “Option 1”, a second “Option 2”, and the third “Healthy Choice”. This would enable more choices and still adhere to the concept of the express tables. I am sure there are other suggestions that might be considered to improve how we are doing things.

Apart from the express tables, do we have a standard process for taking orders. We do not begin taking orders until all “appetizers” have been served, which seems to suggest that nothing is being plated until the orders are received. If the servers take all the orders before delivering them to the kitchen (which seems to frequently, but not always, be the case), then we are looking at the longest possible wait times to be served. Then, takeouts are plated after everyone else has been served meaning very late meals for those eating in their units. Truly inefficient.

Possibilities might include plating takeouts while appetizers are being served and initial orders are being taken. Perhaps orders in the dining room might be taken one-third at a time to allow plating to occur while other orders are being taken — and allowing all tables to be served more quickly following their orders. As it is now, I find myself reassuring individuals multiple times that they have indeed ordered.