

# NATION'S Restaurant News

THE NEWS LEADER OF THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY • WWW.NRN.COM

Vol. 41, No. 44

PUBLISHED EACH MONDAY • A LEBHAR-FRIEDMAN PUBLICATION • \$5/ISSUE

NOVEMBER 5, 2007

SPECIAL REPORT: **FCSI**

## Issues of interest to operator clients explored by conferencing consultants



BY CATHERINE R. COBB

ATLANTA – Ethics among consultants and methods for keeping client costs down were among the topics of relevance to operators discussed during the recent Foodservice Consultants Society International's annual North American Conference here.

The three-day event in October at the Omni CNN Center attracted about 300 consultants and allied professionals and carried the theme, "Connecting the Pieces – Solving the Puzzle." During the affiliated awards banquet Tom Mears, chief executive of The Holland Inc., was honored as the 2007 Trendsetter.

Conference speakers addressed a variety of salient topics through a number of panels or presentations, including one called "Ethics, Morality and Integrity: How Decisions are Made."

John Nackley, president and chief executive of InterMetro Industries Corp., a provider of foodservice storage and transport solutions, said that those in the industry who wish to be ethical should act accordingly and deal only with ethical individuals and businesses.

"We cannot control or dictate how companies or individuals will act," Nackley said. "The only way to manage the situation is for the entire channel – manufacturer, consultant, dealers and representatives – to vote with their conscience by not rewarding those in violation of ethical policies. In essence we must 'do what's right.'"

Members of the panel made up of professionals from the consulting and supplier side agreed that ethics should not ultimately be policed but rather self-directed.

Nackley said design is favorably impacted when a consultant or supplier follows the ethical course of striving to provide "what's the best for the customer," such as tightly integrated designs or products that are right for the job.

Amos Rice, who worked in the purchasing group for chicken-chain operator Chick-fil-A for 18 years, said dealing honestly with people takes character, and to deceive or mislead is a character flaw.

Other presentations at the conference pertinent to operators included a panel called "Falling Through the Cracks." The panelists contended that the greatest unnecessary costs in time or money for many projects stem from bad organization or communications skills among the consultants and other parties involved.

Ira Beer, a 30-year industry veteran and manager and director of Beer Associates, stressed that the best way to avoid such problems during foodservice construction is through peer review.

"It is the only way," he said. "One person is just not able to go through the process alone. No one is perfect, so we have to have constant reviews, double-[and] triple-checking to make sure nothing is overlooked."

Arlene Spiegel, with 20 years of experience in consulting to restaurants, said the biggest opportunity for mistakes is during the "hand-off" from one of the sub-contractors to another or to the master architect. To avoid mistakes, she said, it is important to get all stakeholders involved from the beginning and have them create realistic timelines for each phase as well as multiple fallback plans. The consultant also underscored the need for regularly scheduled stakeholder meetings.

"A shared vision of the outcome, based on the client's goals, must stay uppermost in everyone's mind throughout the project," said Spiegel, of Arlene Spiegel and Associates. "The process should be disciplined and as enjoyable as the outcome."

Other presentations centered on such topics as green trends, disaster preparedness, website development for foodservice consultants and building information management.

An awards banquet and celebration midconference honored a number of distinguished FCSI members as well as 2007 Trendsetter awardee Mears of The Holland. Mears and his Vancouver, Wash.-based company, which

owns 39 quick-service Burgerville units in Oregon and Washington, were honored for their dedication to promoting ecologically sound and sustainable business practices.

The conference wrapped up on the third day with the North American Division's Annual Business Meeting, when 2006-2007 division chair Edmeston "Ed" Bernard passed the gavel to chair-elect Cornyn. Karen Malody, the conference committee planning chair, said Bernard's leadership brought clarity, vision, focus and an unwavering effort to get the North American Division united and headed in a singular, understandable direction. She added that new division chair Cornyn possesses many of the same qualities as Bernard.

"He and Ed have worked closely together, so the transition will be more seamless than some have been," she said. "John will work to the end to make things happen, build the FCSI brand through member participation – always a challenge in volunteer organizations – and reach out to other organizations." She added that Cornyn will do "anything to bring focus to the offerings available by FCSI consultants."

Cornyn said the biggest challenge facing FCSI members today

Above, from left: "Falling Through the Cracks" panelists Arlene Spiegel, Arlene Spiegel & Associates; Brian Schwagerl, Hearst Corp.; Warren Ashworth, Architect

is staying on top of all the current "hot" issues, including the green movement, increasingly strict environmental laws starting at the local level, raw-food production and processing safety, and immigration reform. These, along with the ongoing issue of how to remain competitive in an increasingly challenging business, are among the topics that are most top of mind among members, he said.

On the operator relations front, Cornyn said restaurateurs, contract managers and institutional staffers can get the most from their relationships with consultants by working with them to frame a practical yet comprehensive scope of work. He said the resulting consultant contribution "should complement, not compete, with the operator's management and culinary team." ■

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