

## *Welcome to ISG's New Dining Hall . . .*

As the red ribbon fell to the ground, students rushed in to grab coveted chicken popcorn, potato wedges, hot meals, fresh tabouli and hummus salads; conscious of the ticking clock. Parents would be happy to know that *most* children were even eating their veggies ...

Although the new cafeteria has been in operation for over six weeks, ISG officially celebrated its inauguration with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the morning of October 20<sup>th</sup>.

The sun was already high in the sky when a group of anxious students gathered on the steps to support ISG Superintendent Norma Hudson by cutting the red ribbon which decorated the cafeteria entrance. Squinting in the warming sun along with Ms. Hudson were several campus dignitaries, including Spin Bennett, ISG Board of Trustees Vice President, David Whitaker, ISG Director of Finance, Chris L'Esteve, ISG Support Services Director, Bill Stapp, ISG Deputy Superintendent, and Deputy Headteacher for Dhahran British Grammar School, John Power.

The Dhahran campus has over 1,200 students and an estimated 40 nationalities represented within three distinct schools; Dhahran High School, Dhahran British Grammar School and Dhahran Elementary and Middle School.

Regardless of cultural origin, however, students seem to bathe their potato wedges in ketchup. Mathew, a 7<sup>th</sup> year DBGS student, simply loves them plain. "Everyone shares food," he explained. So, perhaps even though his classmate, also called Matthew, opted for a "healthy and balanced hot meal", he may have snatched a few wedges before I emerged on the scene.

Having been 'bored' by the food options last year, DBGS 4<sup>th</sup> year student Ali appreciated the greater selection and gave the new cafeteria a "thumbs up".

While quite positive regarding food quality and selection, a group of 8<sup>th</sup> year DBGS students echoed the sentiments of 12<sup>th</sup> grade Dhahran High School classmates Yara, Umar, Maria and Sumer in hoping that chicken shwarmas, tacos, pasta and pizza make a return appearance. An energetic and friendly group of 8<sup>th</sup> year DBGS students also put in a plug for muffins, better quality chocolates and ice cream; and in a leap of faith, they even pitched the idea of breakfast options such as fluffy pancakes. It never hurts to dream ...

NESMA does offer a wide variety of food options, ranging from fresh fruit and salads to sandwiches, fried snacks and balanced meals.

Although students may be disappointed to learn that chocolates and sodas are missing due to school policy, vinegar is *not* the only option for salad dressing. Upon further investigation, french dressing is definitely available. Just ask the staff. Having a larger bottled water option and a desire for chocolate milk were two more constructive comments received from students. Mashal, Nahla and Noor, senior students at DBGS also suggested that NESMA consider a return of cheese bread as some students avoid eating meat away from home and heavier foods during the day.

Perhaps two of the most critical issues identified include the *hot* food ... well, being rather tepid. Students and staff have also found that on occasion the menu options have dwindled towards day's end.

Ramadan and virtual week gave NESMA, the new catering company under contract with ISG, valuable time to begin sorting out these and other operational wrinkles.

"NESMA has been very responsive to all feedback," commented Hal Cooke, Assistant Principal of Dhahran Elementary and Middle School (DEMS), who has been overseeing the transition process. "If the food is too salty," he explained, "the comment filters back to me through teachers and is then brought directly to NESMA staff." NESMA staff is also tracking the number of students daily and monitoring demand patterns to help them plan better and ensure that food items do not run out.

Jodutt, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade Dhahran High School student liked the new system but was concerned that the process of giving change and receipts was contributing to a time delay. In response, Lucy, Nika and Zinab (all 5<sup>th</sup> graders from Dhahran Elementary Middle School) suggested a debit system; followed by a more fanciful request for snow cones.

According to Hal Cooke, a debit system was considered by ISG administration. Such an automated system, however, would have added a myriad of other complications rather than address the actual problem. Instead, the orientation of the cafeteria and the overall payment system has been tweaked to address bottlenecks. The cafeteria opened with two service lines and cashiers. Currently, there

are four cashiers and two distinct service lines which wrap around the outside wall.

“Ironically,” Hal explained, “we have discovered delays as a result of NESMA’s higher level of service.” Although personalized, the process of handing students their food selection is slow; especially when nearly 400 students must be served within a 30-minute time period. In response to this finding, NESMA will be installing a self-service cabinet so that students can select their own fried foods and keep the line moving.

NESMA Supervisor, Mr. Ansari, appreciated the supportive and constructive comments received from students. While recent kitchen equipment upgrades will help ensure food freshness, temperature and availability, he pointed out that “students may have to wait a few minutes from time to time for fresh fried foods.” Such prepared foods can only be kept for a limited amount of time and although a new batch of chicken popcorn may be ready in a matter of minutes, it can seem like an eternity to an energetic and hungry student.

Luckily, students recognize that while the new cafeteria is a huge improvement over the past location, it is also a work in process. Twelfth-grade Dhahran High School students Mallori, Nadia and Hana, who had stopped in during their free period, also gave the new cafeteria a ‘thumbs up’ and echoed the overall sentiment; the food quality has improved.

After lobbying hard for the return of a ‘senior privilege’ line and hot sauce, they raved about the fresh salads and commented on the friendliness of the staff.

It seems the new cafeteria offers a brighter and more relaxed, happier environment.

“It does not feel as crowded as before,” commented Dana and Ahmed, 10<sup>th</sup> grade Dhahran High School students.

The former cafeteria, referred to by some as the *cafetorium* due to its location in an actual auditorium, was noisy and less efficient. Sound echoed through the high ceilings, while masses – rather than lines of students – jockeyed for position to purchase food.

The chaos associated with setting up tables, chairs and serving areas on a daily basis have become a thing of the past and although Bava and other staff members were on the go constantly cleaning off tables, as subsequent waves of students came in for lunch, they were very pleased with the new, more manageable space.

Situated among the three campus schools, the new dining hall serves as a more comfortable, gathering place, offering an abundance of natural light and an opportunity for increased efficiency.

The new dining hall is a reality thanks to the cooperation of countless individuals. In particular, ISG administration wishes to thank the Board of Trustees for approving the project. Special recognition is directed also to NESMA Manager Jim Awad for his partnership and receptivity to the many valuable suggestions offered by Ian Jones and John Power (Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher for Dhahran British Grammar School), Jana Barnhouse and Hal Cooke (Dhahran Elementary Middle School Principal and Vice Principal), David Dorn and David Butler (Dhahran High School Principal and Vice Principal), Chris L’Esteve (ISG Support Services Director), Bill Stapp (ISG Deputy Superintendent), and the many teachers and students who have taken the time to provide feedback and encouragement. Thank you also to Nick Hardcastle, Head of Dhahran British Grammar Senior School, for creating the initial picture gallery from the celebration.

“MABROOK” to NESMA and all who have made ISG’s new dining hall a reality! See you in line!