



4 Ways to Blindside the Competition with a Holiday Menu

By Susan Saldibar

You've no doubt heard the old expression, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Of course, it's woefully outdated, but few would argue that food has powers that go beyond nutritional value. (Think "comfort" foods!)

Here's the point. Every holiday season senior living communities roll out their seasonal menus and special treats. And they might get the occasional "My, that's delicious!" But, that's pretty much it, until next year rolls around. What a wasted opportunity. Especially for the marketing department. Where's the "wow" factor that will keep the memory of your great community alive for residents, families and visitors, long after the holidays are over?

No one understands the power of a great holiday menu better than the folks at [Gordon Food Service](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner). I spoke with Dana Fillmore, RDN, and Healthcare Customer Marketing Manager, who agrees that senior living communities often waste an opportunity to optimize not only their food they serve, but how they engage with prospects and the greater community over the holidays.

Show Off Your Culinary Flare

Here are some of Dana's tips on how to use the holidays to really show off your culinary flare and bring more of what she calls "wow power" into your community over the holidays:

1. **Get creative.** Resist the temptation to keep recycling old recipes. Challenge your chef to be more creative with a few new meal ideas. Then spotlight his/her culinary creativity in photos and videos that you can share with residents and over social media. (Of course, Dana reminds communities to never take or share photos or videos of staff or residents until you have obtained proper waivers from them in advance.)

2. **Always strive to go a “cut above”.** A good cut of meat doesn’t have to cost a fortune. Yes, it sounds good to include prime rib on the menu. But if it’s paper thin and overcooked it’s a waste of money (and taste buds). But it doesn’t have to be! Dana urges you to not give up on great dining ideas just because you think they might be too expensive. Talk to your food service partner to find the right quality and price point. They can work with you to get the best value for your money. “We worked with a skilled nursing provider to help them put delicious prime rib on their dining table without breaking the bank,” Dana says.
3. **Give your food the festive setting it deserves.** Holiday dining is more than the great food. What are you doing to create an atmosphere that is special? This is a perfect time to spruce up your dining areas. Add small centerpieces and other decorations. Examine your existing decorations. Change out the old ones and add fresh ideas to your decorating.
4. **Spread the festive holiday spirit throughout the community.** How your staff members greet visitors and attend to residents says so much about your community, especially during the holidays. Encourage them to come up with their own creative ideas for décor and special ways of welcoming family and friends of residents. It will keep them involved and engaged.

Don’t stop there. Market, market, market!

Okay, so you may say you are already doing all these things. But here’s the key. How are you marketing it all? You can turn your holiday food and festivities into a valuable marketing tool. How? By taking videos and photos of the food, décor and, most importantly, of residents and families enjoying it. Share your holiday festivities on your web page and your social media outlets. Share your recipes and provide cooking instructions.

Now when staff, residents and families say “Oooh. Delicious!” you will have the moment captured on video. When they talk about the delicious prime rib with Hollandaise sauce you will have a photo to show off and a recipe to share.

Impress Your Residents and "Wow!" Your Visitors

The holiday season, more than any other, is an opportunity to show how well you treat your residents. It gives you a chance to show off your best menus, prepared and presented in a way that separates your community from the rest.

As Dana says, “You can create holiday menus to really ‘wow’ your visitors into seeing that yours is a special place with people who care about their residents,” Dana adds. “Use the holidays to make your community memorable. Be the community that they leave saying, ‘This is the place I want to bring mom/dad to’ or better yet, ‘This is the kind of place I would actually move into’. All the advertising in the world can’t buy that.”

Want some help with the menu? Gordon Food Service has a great article, complete with mouth-watering holiday recipes and cost savings tips. You can access it [here](#).



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