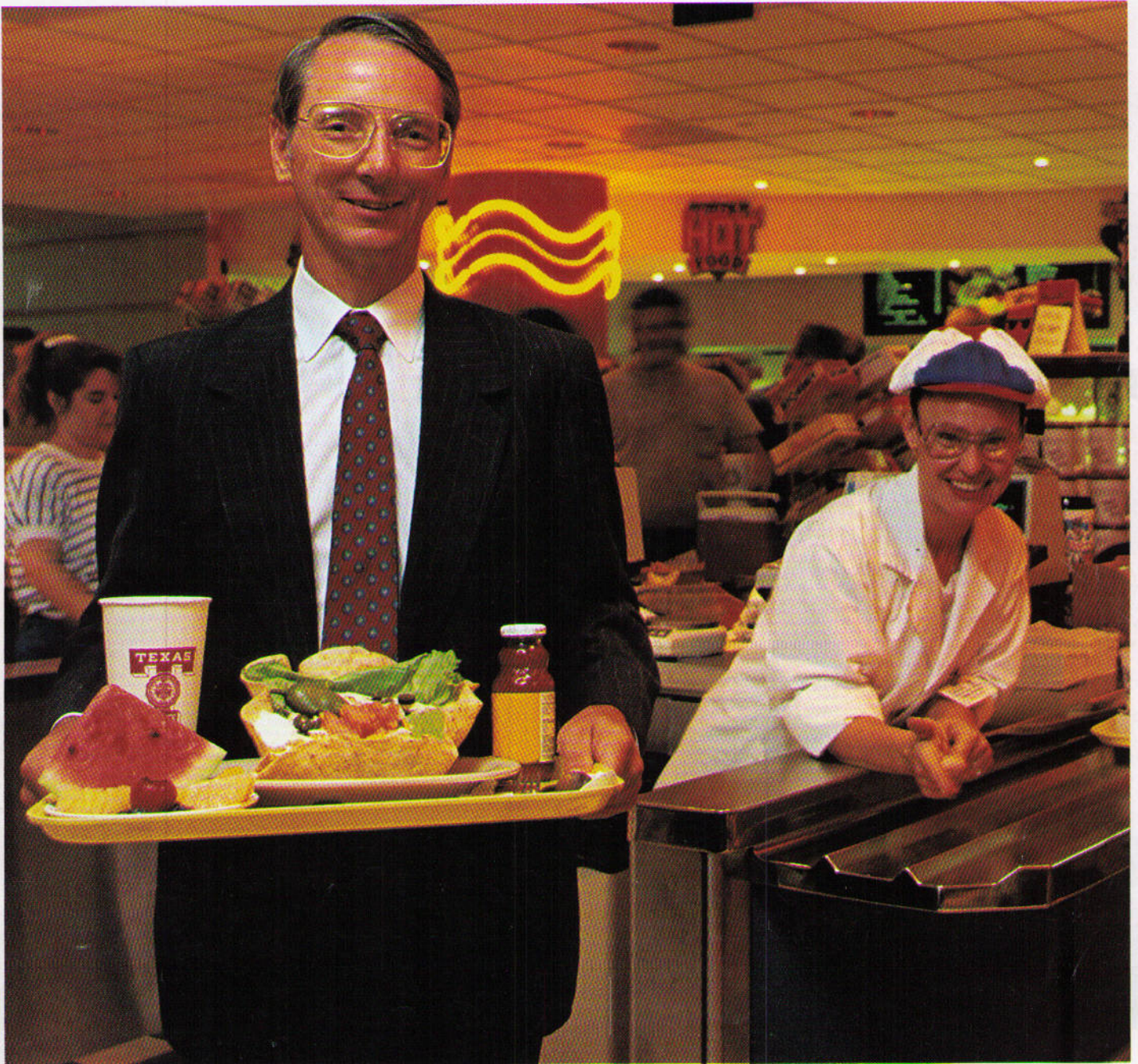


FOOD MANAGEMENT

SEPTEMBER 1991

\$5.00

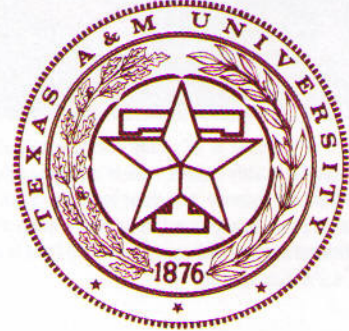


TEXAS A&M

THE NEXT



GENERATION



When Lloyd Smith

was named Texas A & M University's
foodservice director in 1987, he faced chal-
lenges never encountered by his predecessors.

Ten new facilities & \$23
million later, Smith has charted a new path to
meet the desires of a
generation of 'Aggie' students who demand
variety & convenience.

Lloyd Smith exits
Hullabaloo's, Texas A & M
foodservice's food court in
the Memorial Student
Center, with examples of
the variety of foods "Ag-
gie" students in the '90s
are demanding—ethnic
choices such as taco sal-
ads, light foods such as
fruit and branded bottled
juices.

By Paul King
Photos by Gary Faye



Bernie's Place is Texas A & M's only "restaurant, although it lacks waitservice." The ambiance is unmistakably Italian, both in menu and decor. Customers place their orders and pay at a walk-up counter, and their food is brought to their tables. Although Bernie's is a comfortable place in which to linger over a meal of pizza or spaghetti and meatballs, because of limited seating (40 seats) as much food is bought for takeout as is purchased to be eaten in the restaurant.



Li'l Bernie's was created to meet demand for Bernie's Place's food on the opposite side of campus. Smith said that because of campus administrators' concern over competition with local pizzerias, foodservice has been prohibited from setting up a delivery service. Designing a satellite of the popular Italian eatery was "the next best thing," Smith noted.

FOODSERVICE DIRECTOR Lloyd Smith was displaying uncharacteristic excitement for this normally soft-spoken, impeccably tailored gentleman. As he listed the virtues of Texas A & M University's (TAMU) newest cash operation, Smith's voice contained a certain intensity, as though what he was relating was not just the story of a single construction project, but rather the culmination of an extraordinary, six-year-long renovation program.

"This servery has been designed so that we can run just about anything we want out of here," Smith effused. "Not only can we change stations simply by altering the menu boards and hanging new signs over the stations, but some stations are equipped to offer different menus for breakfast, lunch and dinner."

"This servery" is in Hullabaloo's, a multi-station, 375-seat food court and dining area that opened in January 1991 in the Memorial Student Center (MSC) on this College Station campus. Warmly decorated with a checkerboard tile floor and yellow neon encircling red pillars, Hullabaloo's servery offers customers eight separate stations, set out in a rough semicircle. Students, faculty, staff and visitors can avail themselves of such items as gourmet hamburgers,

grilled sandwiches, barbecued meats, pizza, pastas and salads.

Hullabaloo's is nearly the conclusion of a six-year story at TAMU. The food court is one-half of the final project in a \$23-million foodservice renovation and expansion program that began in 1985. (The other half is the renovation of the MSC Cafeteria, which was scheduled to be completed this month.) Its diversity and versatility both epitomize Lloyd Smith's vision of what the "next generation" of TAMU students—40,000 food-wise collegians of the '90s—expects from foodservice and speak to the principal reason underlying the overhaul of TAMU's foodservice.

Characterizing any group of university students as a generation is arbitrary. New students come on campus every year. However, the dining habits of today's "Aggies" set them apart from the students who attended TAMU in the '70s and early '80s. Smith said his department's customers today seem to possess more discriminating palates and they desire speed and convenience from their campus food operations.

"In the last 10 years, our students have become more sophisticated in their food tastes," Smith reflected. "Like most people their age, they eat out more frequently than their parents did. They grew up on fast food and they expect that kind of menu and service from our cash operations. But they are not so much concerned with price as they are variety and high quality. They want good food and they expect plenty of choices."

A student population explosion over the last two decades has added an exclamation point to the foodservice department's need to expand and diversify. There are more "Aggies" than ever before, and a larger percentage of these students are commuters.



The dining habits of today's 'Aggies' set them apart from

Innovation has not been confined to TAMU's cash operations. When Duncan Hall (right) was renovated in 1986, Smith designed a "plate-ready" system for serving the cadets dining in this facility. The Duncan servery's 14 stations are designed so that cadets can select exactly what they want to eat without having to wait. This ensures that the university's 2,200 cadets are served within 15 minutes.

"In the '70s and '80s, the university experienced tremendous growth," Smith explained. "We went from 14,000 students in 1970 to more than 40,000 15 years later. To accommodate those students, the campus also expanded, with new classrooms and other buildings. This expansion created the opportunity for us to make changes."

Because the majority of the population increase has consisted of commuting students, Smith realized that his department would have to reorient itself from operating primarily residence hall dining units to placing a stronger emphasis on cash foodservice. More customers have created the demand not only for more foodservice facilities but for larger staff to operate them. The department employed about 600 people full- and part-time in the early 1980s; now, more than 1,000 professionals and students work there.

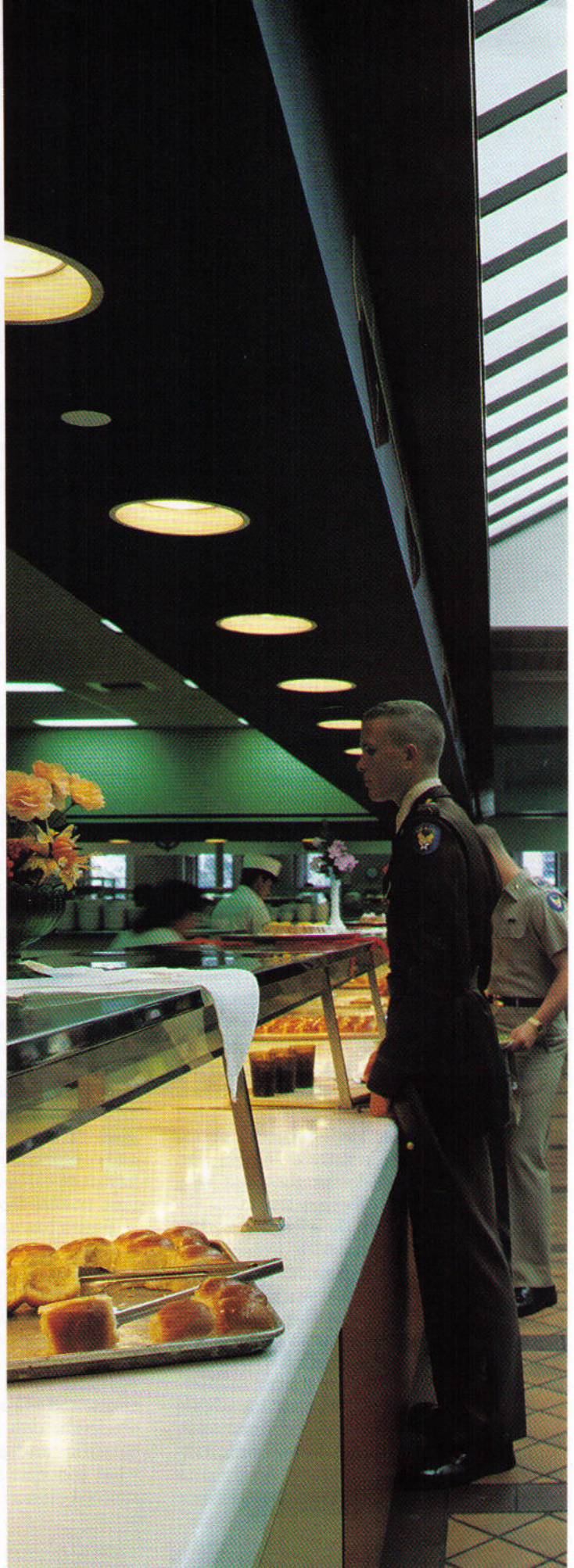
"Our role is to serve the entire campus population," Smith continued. "Otherwise, non-resident students will take their food dollars to the restaurants off campus."

As a result, in the past five years, 10 foodservice operations—all cash—have been added, and a few existing snack bars have been renovated. Construction projects have ranged in size from the \$180,000 construction of the tiny Bus Stop snack bar in 1986 to the soon to be completed, \$4.4-million renovation of the foodservice operations in the MSC. Some of these new facilities are adjuncts to the three residence hall dining centers—Commons, Duncan and Sbisa—that serve the 11,000 students who live on campus. Others are freestanding units that are located near—or, in some cases, in—academic and administrative buildings. Combined, they bring in more than \$7 million annually.

The man who has headed this attempt to satisfy the foodservice desires of the next generation of Aggies is himself the "next" generation, but in a different context. When Lloyd Smith was promoted to foodservice director in 1987, replacing the retired Fred Dollar, he became only the seventh foodservice director in the 115-year history of TAMU.

Smith stepped into these directorial waters facing challenges his predecessors never encountered. Fortunately, Smith has benefited from the legacy of innovation left him

the students in the '70s & early '80s.





By expanding the menu, setting up effective displays of grab-and-go items and jazzing up the outlet with neon, Smith transformed the Commons Snack Bar into the Common Denominator. The renovated snack bar has been so popular (averaging \$3,400 per day) that the opening of Li'l Bernie's in the same room has not adversely affected sales. The Common Denominator is set up for self-service, speeding through-put of busy students.

by Dollar and the freedom to begin some of his own projects while he was still Dollar's assistant. Thus, Smith's tenure has brought about not so much a metamorphosis as an evolution.

Lloyd Smith is a more innovative and complex individual than one would expect at first glance. Striding purposefully across campus making his rounds, Smith appears more like an accountant than a foodservice director. In his standard working attire—a suit and tie—Smith gives every appearance of possessing a very quiet, ultra-conservative soul.

However, walk through the neon-lit entrance to the Ag CaFe or the mall-like servery of Hullabaloo's and you begin to see that Lloyd Smith has an adventurous heart beneath that accountant's exterior. This 46-year-old farm boy from Livingston, Montana, is a mechanic, a tinkerer, a man who loves to learn as he goes and who never seems to forget a lesson.

"Growing up on a farm, I had to know which end of a wrench was which," Smith explained. "I learned a lot of basic electrical work, plumbing and mechanics. During my college days, I bought a house and we did some of our own repair."

Smith worked in college foodservice while doing his undergraduate work at the University of Montana in Missoula. Among his accomplishments were helping to design and build some stadium concession

stands and his contributions to the design of the foodservice renovation in the university's student union.

"My education continued here at Texas A & M," Smith continued. "It seems that we've always been in the midst of building here, and if you don't take the opportunity to learn about that aspect of foodservice as you go, you're going to end up in a lot of trouble in this business."

There is more to Smith's education, however, than practical experience in facility design and construction. He earned his undergraduate degree in chemistry and zoology, and he got as far as his thesis project for a master's degree in microbiology when he decided that a scientist's life was not for him.

"I realized that what I really enjoyed was this job I had in foodservice," said Smith, who at the time was an assistant unit manager at Montana. "I quit pursuing microbiology and concentrated on foodservice." He has since earned a master's degree in food science from TAMU.

Smith has used his scientist's analytical mind in his approach to the expansion and revamping of TAMU foodservice. Using periodic customer surveys—both formal and informal—taste tests for students, a resident student menu board that provides input into student preferences, and information gleaned from observant unit managers, Smith has carefully and precisely ascertained what concepts and menu items will succeed on his campus, and where.

"I don't like to open a cash operation unless I'm very sure that it will do at least \$2,000 a day," said Smith. "And we can do that; we can do it as long as we understand what it is our customers want."

The university for which Smith manages foodservice has not changed dramatically in the 19 years since he came to College Station from the University of Montana. The university is still geared academically to the disciplines of agriculture and engineering. TAMU's military presence, the 2,200-student Corps of Cadets that has been an integral part of the university since its founding in 1876, is very much in evidence. Eighty percent of the "Aggies" still hail from Texas' three major cities—Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio.

Although TAMU is still traditional enough to offer students the well-known, all-you-can-eat "board" plans (six types, from seven to 20 meals per week), participation in them by residents has been voluntary since 1977. Smith said that about 50% of all students, living on campus or off, opt for a meal plan.

To try to make these meal plans more flexible—and capture more of students' discretionary dollars—foodservice introduced Aggie Bucks, a declining balance program, in 1984. Aggie Bucks has been made a part of four of the campus's meal plans and provides resident students with from \$100 to \$210 in credit (depending on the plan) they can use to purchase foods in cash operations.



The Underground's subdued dining area is an oasis of calm on the bustling TAMU campus. After selecting their meals from among the six stations in the food court-style servery, students enjoy relaxing here and gazing at the series of Southwestern murals along the rear wall. Smith commissioned the murals from a local mother-son artist team. The artwork depicts four desert scenes done in pastels.

Non-residents can also make use of Aggie Bucks through the Aggie Express card. Aggie Express provides \$350 in declining balance that can be used in any food outlet.

The board plans are valid in the university's three residence dining halls, the largest foodservice facilities on campus. Sbisa, which has 1,750 seats, is the biggest revenue-generator at \$7 million per year. Commons, with 1,200 seats, brings in \$3.6 million per year. Duncan, where the university's 2,200 cadets dine, has 2,500 seats and accounts for \$3.5 million annually.

Before 1986 there were few places on campus where the Aggie Bucks program could have been used. In addition to the dining halls, foodservice operated five snack bars scattered across the campus. Known primarily for fast food—grilled items, pre-packaged foods, snacks and beverages—the snack bars are so small that even today they generate only \$1.4 million of the foodservice department's total revenue of \$25 million. In early 1986, Smith—with Dollar's blessing—began to change all that.

He started small by adding two more snack bars. Rumours is located in the MSC, while the Bus Stop is a converted bus shelter at one of the busiest intersections on campus.

Rumours, which contains 80 seats, generates \$140,000 a year in grab-and-go sales, primarily of gourmet hamburgers. It operates from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Bus Stop is one of Smith's

more unusual success stories. The Bus Stop is an enclosed snack bar, with 32 outdoor seats, located across from the Aerospace/Computer Science Building. The Bus Stop generates as much as \$2,500 per day (\$400,000 per year) in sales with a limited grill menu. It operates from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

"This area is very busy, and we thought—correctly, as it turns out—that we would be able to catch a lot of students walking across campus from one class to another," said Smith.

Buoyed by that success, Smith plunged into two additional projects—the \$1.2-million construction of multi-station Pie Are Square and the \$274,000 renovation of the Commons Snack Bar.

Neon-decorated, 165-seat Pie Are Square is an expanded deli concept located in the Texas Transportation Institute, a campus engineering complex. It operates from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, and offers customers their choice of a hot entree, grilled items, sandwiches by the inch, and salad and baked potato bars. Pie Are Square generates \$600,000 in sales each year.

The Commons Snack Bar, located in Commons Dining Hall, was redone as the Common Denominator. While it still operates as a snack bar, from 10:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with a walk-up counter that features grill items, prepared sandwiches and salads, des-

serts and beverages, sales have shot up from \$600 per day to \$3,400 per day. The following year, 1987, Smith became director and hired Jim Moore as his assistant. The two men introduced two new concepts on campus. Bernie's Place was opened in a room adjacent to Sbisa Dining Hall, and the Ag CaFe was built in a new academic and research building. Together, they bring in \$1 million in annual revenue.

The Ag CaFe was patterned after Pie Are Square. Smith said he sought permission to add foodservice to this academic building because he knew that customer traffic would support an operation easily.

"This building is a focal point for this area of campus," Smith said. "It's mostly a research building, although there are some classrooms here. However, there are four other buildings in the general area, and two more are slated to be built. Those buildings will mean another 5,000 people gathering in this area. So, we considered the Ag CaFe to be a good investment."

The Ag CaFe is a cash operation, open from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. A neon-lit canopy marks both the entryway and the cashiers' station, leading to a rectangular servery that features a grill, deli, entree station, dessert area and beverage island. There is also a refrigerated case from which a variety of packaged branded items such as yogurt, bottled water and seltzer are sold. A 210-seat dining area is next to the exit. The Ag CaFe takes in

Texas A&M

\$2,400 in revenue per day.

Bernie's Place, named after the late foodservice director, Bernard Sbisa, captures the feel of a family-run Italian eatery with its dark interior, red-and-white checked tablecloths, plants and multi-colored awning that hangs over the serving line. The 40-seat restaurant features pizza, sandwiches, lasagna, spaghetti, ravioli, stuffed shells and several chicken dishes, including its signature item, Chicken a la Bernie's.

Smith said Bernie's Place generates revenue of between \$20,000 and \$25,000 per week, operating from 10:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. on weekdays and 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. on weekends.

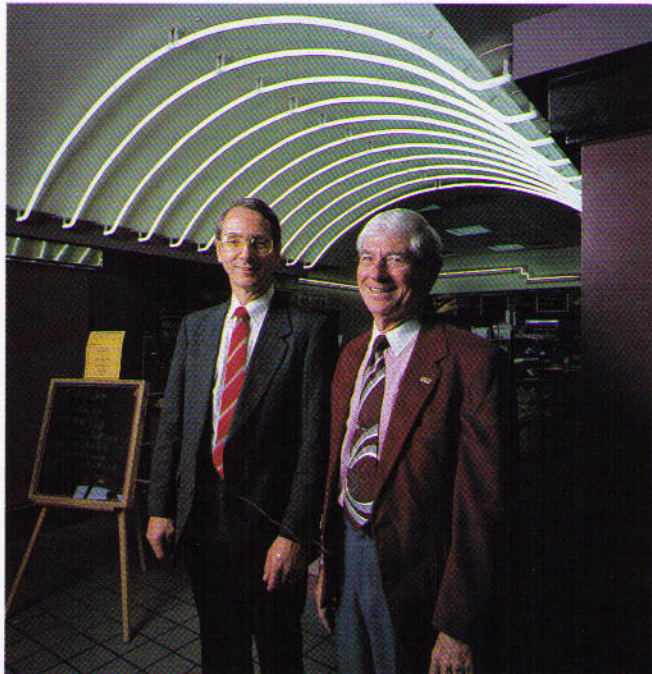
In 1988, foodservice took a brief respite from new construction, devoting its energy to a \$4-million renovation and expansion of the Commons Dining Hall to accommodate the expansion of modular dormitories in that area. The following year, foodservice returned to its focus on cash sales, with the construction of The Underground and The Market, both in the basement of Sbisa Dining Hall.

The Underground closely resembles a shopping mall food court, even though customers pay at a central cashier station. The six serving stations have been given colorful names to pique students' curiosity and make the station more fun. There is Mrs. Sbisa's Kitchen, where jumbo hot-dogs, gourmet hamburgers, fried chicken and soups are among the offerings. The Fortune Cookie serves a la carte Chinese food. Sbisa Square deli sells sub sandwiches by the inch, along with a wide variety of other deli sandwiches. Tio Taco is Mexican, Sundae School sells ice cream and LeBun Shoppe offers baked goods.

There are 320 seats in two separate dining areas that sport a Southwestern theme, highlighted by murals of desert scenes painted by a local

mother-and-son artist team. The Underground generates \$2,500 per day in revenue, operating from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Attached to The Underground is a convenience store known as The Market. This store is open from 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. weekdays and noon to 10 p.m. weekends, and generates \$1.1 million per year. Smith said that 80% of The Mar-



Jim Moore (at right) was brought on board in 1987 to serve as Lloyd Smith's assistant. One of the first projects completed with Moore's guidance was the Ag CaFe. Both Smith and Moore are pleased with the look of this facility, with its neon-lit entry, as well as its success. The Ag CaFe was the first foodservice outlet built in an academic building on the TAMU campus.

ket's items are food.

Buoyed by The Market's success, foodservice turned to the Commons Dining Hall the following year and installed The Common Market. This store, open during the same hours as The Market and selling similar items, has achieved similar success, with \$1 million in annual sales.

At the same time, Smith decided to capitalize on the success of Bernie's Place by creating a satellite operation in Commons. Li'l Bernie's opened in October 1990 next to the Common Denominator.

Li'l Bernie's offers a menu identi-

cal to Bernie's Place with one exception: no sandwiches are sold. Li'l Bernie's generates sales of more than \$2,000 per day, even though it is open only from 5 p.m. to midnight, six nights a week.

TAMU's latest foodservice project, Hullabaloo's, opened last January. The name may be traditional, coming as it does from a phrase in the university's fight song, but the concept is strictly contemporary. Located in the basement of the student center, Hullabaloo's offers customers eight

separate serving stations. At far left as you enter is a station that serves made-to-order breakfasts in the morning and soups and sandwiches at lunch. A gourmet burger station, which features third-pound burgers, chicken sandwiches and Philly cheese steak sandwiches, is just to the right. Continuing to the right, diners will find a specialty food station, which offers two or three entrees per meal; a barbecue area where beef brisket is carved to order; a pastry case; an ice cream station; a Mexican station; and an Italian entree and pizza station.

TAMU's next generation of students seems to have taken to Hullabaloo's, despite a name that outsiders might consider corny. The food court is generating an average of \$8,000 per day; Smith expects that amount to increase to \$10,000 once the fall semester starts.

Smith expects similar success with his last scheduled project, the as-yet-unnamed upper-level cafeteria in the Memorial Student Center. This will feature a more typical type of straight-line cafeteria service, something that still works on the TAMU campus.

"I think and hope that we have built versatility into our total foodservice operation," said Smith. "We have had to look closely at what's hot and push those buttons. This new generation of students expects variety, and their tastes seem to change more quickly than in the past. We need to be ready for that." ∅