Dining Transition Issues and Clarifications

On April 2, 2008 the College announced that Bon Appétit Management Company would be assuming responsibility for operating campus dining as of July 1, 2008. This was the recommendation of the Dining Task Force, formed in 2007 to solicit proposals and evaluate the respondents and ultimately to choose a college partner for Carleton Dining Services. Since the announcement in April, Bon Appétit, Sodexo and Carleton have worked together to plan the transition which is to take place at the end of June. Recently, concerns were raised by a number of students concerning their understanding of how the dining workers were being treated by Bon Appétit.

**Employees**

The majority of the Sodexo employees at Carleton – 58 as of May 2008 – are members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 70. As noted in our announcement of April 2, Bon Appétit expected to hire all of the Sodexo union employees. As of today, they have individually interviewed each of the union members and have offered employment to 56 of them, 55 of whom have accepted their offer of employment. Two employees were not offered employment. In these offers, Bon Appétit noted that employment was subject to the completion of drug and background checks (as required by Carleton in the terms of the Request for Proposal document) and that benefits would be determined by a new collective bargaining agreement (also referred to as a contract) to be negotiated with the union. Employees were directed to the Northfield Allina clinic to schedule their drug tests over the past three weeks, and were asked to consent to a background check by First Advantage.

There appears to be some confusion caused by the letters of offer which were provided to those Sodexo employees that Bon Appétit intends to hire. In these letters, Bon Appétit offered each employee wages that were equal to or greater than their current wages, and that were in fact consistent with the wage levels negotiated for 2008-2009 in the Sodexo contract. Because Bon Appétit was required to make offers of employment before negotiating with the union, the letters outlined “standard” Bon Appétit benefits, with the expectation that benefit levels would change subject to negotiation of a final collective bargaining agreement. While it is a source of anxiety and confusion, these issues cannot be resolved until the union negotiating teams have completed their work and a final contract is approved by the membership.

**Union**

As a result of hiring more than half of the bargaining unit, Bon Appétit is qualified to enter into negotiations with the union. From the beginning, it has been the understanding and intent of both Carleton and Bon Appétit that the union would be recognized and that Bon Appétit would negotiate a new contract with them. A first meeting was held by the Union and Bon Appétit on May 15 and 16 and subsequent sessions are scheduled for June 12 and 13. It is their desire to complete negotiations by July 1 if possible.
Accrued Benefits
As of June 30, the current union employees of Sodexo will end their relationship with Sodexo and those being hired by Bon Appétit will begin employment with a new employer. Accrued vacation and sick time earned while working for Sodexo will be paid out in cash by Sodexo, in accordance with the union contract last negotiated between Sodexo and the union in 2006. Bon Appétit has indicated that they will begin benefits for new employees as of their date of hire, except for medical benefits for which they have a corporate policy of a 90 day waiting period. As has been the case in the past, most dining staff are not actively working over the summer. Everyone working for Sodexo today is eligible for COBRA health care continuation coverage in their existing health plan. Bon Appétit and the union are negotiating how the costs of these payments will be covered during the 90 day waiting period.

Pension benefits under the Sodexo contract were provided by the Operating Engineers Local 70 pension plan. Benefit entitlement under this plan is covered by the plan description and provides for full vesting after five years of participation in the plan. Future pension benefits are subject to the collective bargaining process and will be resolved when that process is complete.

In addition to the above labor issues, Bon Appétit is working to revise menus and the physical layout of the serving and dining areas to the extent that these can be accomplished this summer. The Dining Task Force and Bon Appétit, and we hope that the dining staff and the campus at large, remain very excited about the proposed new dining programs. We look forward to a productive and exciting new year beginning in the Fall.

Specific Questions that have been raised:

Q: Is it Bon Appétit’s intent to disregard the union or to convert Carleton to a non-union site?

A: No, Bon Appétit and Carleton have agreed from the beginning that it was our intent to move forward recognizing the union that represents the dining workforce and working in good faith with them to obtain a long term agreement. We believe that steps to accomplish this are well underway.

Q: Will the Sodexo workers lose their benefits and be without health care?

A: No, we believe that the collective bargaining agreement to be reached between Bon Appétit and Local 70 will provide for benefits and for continued health care coverage, including COBRA coverage for the summer of 2008.

More information about the status of these negotiations will be posted on the Dining Services web site where the original Frequently Asked Questions were posted. This can be found at: http://go.carleton.edu/dining.