

John Dewey Pupils Rave Over Fast-Food School Lunch

By MIMI SHERATON

"I'm sorry I'm graduating this year," said Nancy O'Shaughnessy, a 12th-grader at the John Dewey High School, in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, as she finished her hamburger, salad and milk.

The Energy Factory, a new pilot program introducing the fast-food concept to school-feeding programs, went into operation at John Dewey on Monday. It is an experiment expected to be repeated at Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem next fall.

Modeled after the fast-food school-lunch program that originated in Las Vegas, Nev., the New York version is earning enthusiastic acceptance after operating for only three days. Participation in the school's lunch program averaged 46 percent of the 3,400-student population with the old, conventional kind of lunches, but it has climbed to 65 percent by the third day. So far, almost all the notices were raves.

'I Love the Shakes'

"I've tasted almost everything here," said Robert Gerber, a robust 11th-grader. "I love the thick chocolate shakes and the burgers are much better than McDonald's. Their's taste like junk food, but these at our school taste as though they're good for us. The fried chicken is good and crisp, although I think the Colonel's extra crispy may be just a little bit better."

The program is conducted as a cooperative effort of the Board of Education, and two unions that did the early research and paid for Local 372 of District Council 37, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The local is made up of Board of Education employees.

Almost all of the fast-food items are produced in the school kitchen and some things purchased prepared, such as pizza shells, rolls, bread and sauces, are made to Board of Education specifications. All flour used is unbleached and there is an attempt to eliminate artificial flavorings, colorings and as many chemical preservatives as possible.

The main elements taken from the fast-food format are five-ounce all-beef hamburgers, plain or with one and a half ounces of American cheese, crisp, moist and well-reasoned fried chicken, crisp and savory pizza slices generously topped with cheese and tomato sauce, a hero sandwich of sliced delicatessen meats, cheese and lettuce, a tuna fish sandwich and a roast-beef sandwich.

Made of a formed loaf of compressed

beef shavings, and sent into the school cooked and sliced, the gray and tasteless beef drew the only consistent complaint from the 30 or so students questioned.

Sold in combination with vitamin-fortified reconstituted french fries and/or a green salad, plus plain milk or a shake, each "combo" costs only 55 cents, a bargain by any standard these days. The Las Vegas lunches, offering potatoes or salad, sell for 85 cents.

Elizabeth Cagan, director of school food services, is hoping to be able to get permission to raise the New York price to 70 or 75 cents, which she considers a more realistic figure.

Each element on the menu is also priced à la carte at a much higher rate since it is hoped that by making the "combos" irresistible bargains, students will be persuaded to choose them, thereby taking the Type A lunch that fulfills the nutrient requirements

of the United States Department of Agriculture.

In addition to the enthusiasm expressed by the students who began to line up at 10 A.M. for the first lunch hour at 10:20, the exuberant spirit of the kitchen staff was obvious.

Virginia Di Capua, the head cook in this kitchen, stops anyone who will listen to tell of her magic recipe for very creditable lasagne which is prepared without cooking the pasta in ad-

vance. "And I put crushed tomatoes and plenty of oregano in that sauce—it's really Italian, you know," she said.

Frances Williams, the dietitian who is the food service supervisor for all high schools in Brooklyn and Staten Island, was working away in the Dewey kitchen wearing the brown and orange Energy Factory uniform and slicing vegetables for the salad bar or "lite-lunch" section of this feeding program. "Imagine kids liking salad and cottage cheese and things like that," she said. "They really take them. We used to prepare these things only for teachers."

In fact, the "lite-lunch" section is one of several deviations New York has added to the basic Las Vegas program.

No Junk Foods Sold

For while 50 percent of the cafeteria lineup area is given over to the fast foods, 20 percent is reserved for what is called the daily special (a hot dish such as lasagne or turkey parmigiana plus salad, fries, milk or a shake) and 30 percent more is for the "lite lunch" with a mix-yourself salad bar supplemented by hard-cooked eggs, sliced delicatessen meats and cottage cheese. And unlike Las Vegas custom, no soft drinks or junk foods are sold in the New York program.

Not only the food, but the surroundings have been improved, all a result of student suggestions of designs for the lunchroom, uniforms, menu graphics and the menu choices as well. One improvement noted by several students is that garbage cans are no longer at the end of each table, but are instead grouped in a unit down the center of the room.

Dr. Michael Costelloe, the new principal at John Dewey who was formerly an assistant to Chancellor Irving Anker, said:

"I have a very positive feeling about these lunches, not only because of the good food. Most of all I am pleased by the student involvement and we hope to continue and expand that by encouraging constant feedback on their feelings about their lunchroom and the food served in it."



Students at John Dewey High School reaching for vitamin-fortified french-fried potatoes at lunch yesterday. Vanilla and chocolate shakes are features of the new fast-food school lunch program.

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