

Hungry? Get to know Andra Smith at DU

Andra Smith, usually called Andy, managed the DU food service during 2009–10 (see accompanying article at right). Here is what Andy says about herself.

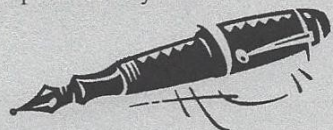
"Most of my working life has been in the food industry. I started as a waitress and cook in high school. I have worked at various things but have always come back to food service.



I worked for Howard Johnson five years as a kitchen manager — here in Bloomington and in Lansing, Mich. I returned to Nashville and was happily married for 32 years. Since being widowed, I have enjoyed a new life with Charlie for almost 13 years.

"I started on campus at Chi Omega years ago as the breakfast cook, and I usually tell people I have been on campus since 'earth was warm.' I then went to ZBT as the main cook for five years. I was at DX for eight years and at Sigma Chi for 24 years. (Andy was the Sigma Chi house director. For many years, she was also the coordinating influence for all IU house directors.) I usually refer to the young men as 'my boys' since I have no children of my own.

"I have ventured into other areas at different times — a Tupperware manager, an insurance agent, and owning my own restaurant — but I always miss the young people of campus. I had retired and was enjoying my lazy life until Ron (Kovener) called and asked if I'd consider coming to DU to manage the kitchen. I am glad he called and I accepted. I am enjoying my DU experience very much."



DU food service scores high

For as long as anyone can remember, DU food service has been managed by the head cook; often, the head cook was the only food service employee other than members who work in the kitchen. There have been difficulties in recent years with member satisfaction, cook performance, and reliability. The first Inter-Fraternity Council/Alumni Inter-Fraternity Council food service survey conducted in 2008 showed that most fraternities used a food service manager of some type; usually a house director who oversaw food operations or a food service contractor. Since it was necessary for DU to make a change in food service staff for the 2009–10 year and since a person with good credentials was willing to come out of retirement to meet the chapter's needs, DU employed Andra "Andy" Smith (see accompanying article at left) as a part-time food service manager to recruit and manage staff, plan menus, order food, and relate with the chapter members' food committee.

The timing of Smith's involvement proved to be fortuitous since there were unexpected staff difficulties during the year. The first head cook selected by Smith was extremely popular among the members but had a disabling accident. Temporary cook arrangements were made as we hoped the injuries would heal. Sadly, the first cook's health prognosis was unfavorable, meaning longer-term arrangements were required, a process that is quite difficult during the school year. Other staff carried over from the prior year also required some fine-tuning. All these arrangements were made by Smith while maintaining an exceptionally high level of member satisfaction.

The second IFC/AIFC food service survey included a confidential member rating of satisfaction showing that member satisfaction with food service at DU was in the top third of IU's 19 fraternities. The satisfaction score showed that "most aspects of food service are above the expectation of most members." While DU spent a higher percentage of payments by members and more per member on food service than the average fraternity, it provided 18 meals per week compared to an average of 16. On a per-meal-provided basis, DU's cost was 9 percent below average. The survey also weighted the type of meal service provided. For example, a cooked-to-order breakfast is counted as one meal, the same as a continental breakfast of nothing more than cereal and milk. When

the type of meal service was considered, the DU food service program rated a 10 percent or higher premium over the typical fraternity. DU also provided more weekend food service and more extensive late-night snacks than is typical. When these benefits are considered, DU had a weighted cost per meal that was more than 20 percent below the average, among the lowest weighted cost per meal of any fraternity — the lowest cost among the fraternities with the highest member satisfaction.

Dishwashing and dining room clean-up at DU has customarily been done by paid members, but finding members to do this work during the day has become increasingly difficult, so some of this work was shifted to added staff this past year. The survey shows that use of paid staff is most customary for these duties. Only six of 14 reporting chapter use unpaid members for dishwashing and dining room cleanup and these chapters have a 5 percent to 10 percent lower cost; DU discontinued this arrangement many years ago since the unpaid kitchen duties could be viewed as a form of hazing.

The survey shows that the number of seats in the dining room at most fraternities is fewer than the house capacity, occupancy, or typical number of members eating. This is the case at DU. This circumstance doubtless contributes to the few number of chapters that serve a family-style or waiter-served meal and is why meal time is no longer the time for such brotherhood activities as singing.

The high food-service satisfaction among DU members caused a problem. The location of DU on Third Street allows live-out members to live in close proximity to the chapter house, a much more convenient location for live-out members than the chapters on North Jordan. Live-out member dues entitle the member to three meals a week at DU; 2.8 meals is the average among fraternities with a live-out fee comparable to DU. But one live-out member told the cook he had "not missed a meal" at the chapter house. It became obvious that the chapter was providing many more meals to live-out members and guests than were provided for in the budget so the cost of food was much higher than planned. Accordingly, DU will offer a live-out food plan in 2010–11, allowing live-out members to eat regularly at the chapter house without feeling guilty; the food committee has said they will police live-out member and guest abuse.