

STORE OF THE MONTH

P.O.D. Market

New Choices for Old Dominion

ARAMARK's latest P.O.D. Market marks its first foray into made-to-order and hot foods

By Linda Lisanti

The University Village area of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., boasts housing, eateries, retail shops — and now a convenience store. ARAMARK Higher Education opened a new P.O.D. Market (Provisions on Demand) there this January that offers made-to-order and hot food concepts not seen before at the company's other campus c-stores.

Launched in 2008, P.O.D. Market is ARAMARK's proprietary convenience store brand, with about 70 locations nationwide. The new University Village store is the second at Old Dominion, where the total student enrollment exceeds 24,000. The campus' first store opened in August 2009 in the middle of a student housing quadrant, on the main side of the university.

Like all P.O.D. Markets, the latest "is a convenience store with the look and feel of a modern market," said Ronya Edwards, district marketing manager for ARAMARK Higher Ed.

Unlike the others, though, the University Village P.O.D. is more of a street store that appeals to both the campus and surrounding communities. The eight-block University Village area — owned by Old Dominion — is on the east side of campus, across the street from the main university. Roughly 80 percent of the store's customer



The newest P.O.D. Market by ARAMARK opened in January at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va.

base is students vs. 20 percent non-students.

When developing a c-store for a college campus, there are several different factors one must take into account that wouldn't be as important if opening a c-store elsewhere, ARAMARK Higher Ed Retail Director Angie D'Ambrosio explained. One of these is making sure the store hours are conducive to students' active schedules. The University Village P.O.D. is open 9 a.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday through

Thursday, and on Fridays and Saturdays, it stays open until 2 a.m.

Another critical factor is incorporating the student meal plans offered by the university, according to D'Ambrosio. The company wanted a location on that side of campus where students could use their meal plans. Before the P.O.D. Market opened, students living in University Village had to cross the street and go to the main campus to purchase a meal under their plans.

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the 2,500-square-foot store's product mix, with about 600 square feet dedicated to made-to-order subs, pizza slices, whole pizzas, wings and soups, as well as prepackaged gourmet salads, wraps and sandwiches for the grab-and-go customer.

From 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday, the University Village P.O.D. Market features a set "Meal Exchange" dinner menu that's available to all meal plan holders. ARAMARK chose this time-frame because it's when most students return to their apartments, Edwards noted. (The campus's other P.O.D. Market offers a Meal Exchange menu during lunch hours.)

Dinner meal options at the new store are:

- A Quick Cuisine (microwavable item) and a beverage.
- A made-to-order, 6-inch sub, plus chips or whole fruit, and a beverage.
- A grab-and-go sandwich, plus chips or whole fruit, and a beverage.
- A salad, plus chips or whole fruit, and a beverage.
- Two slices of pizza and a beverage.

For Old Dominion students with the highest-level "Block 120" meal plan, they not only have access to the Meal Exchange dinner menu any day and at any time, but also anytime access to breakfast and lunch menus. The lunch and dinner menus are identical. Breakfast

options are:

- A bagel with cream cheese or jelly, plus whole fruit and a beverage.
- A breakfast sandwich and a beverage.
- A parfait, plus whole fruit and a beverage.

Across all three day parts of the store's Meal Exchange program, the beverage choices are always milk, a juice carton, a 24-ounce fountain drink or a 12-ounce hot beverage.

Aside from this fresh-food focus, the University Village P.O.D. Market carries a more extensive selection of fresh and packaged groceries — the reason being that University Village apartments have full kitchens, allowing the students who live there to cook their own meals.

"If someone is making tacos, they can stop here and get cheese instead of having to go to the grocery store," said Dan Wilson, P.O.D. Market location manager. He also noted the store carries a large variety of fresh produce including lettuce, onions, tomatoes, green peppers, bananas, oranges and seasonal items such as strawberries, blackberries and blueberries.

The store's 1,914 SKUs include many microwavable items too, such as Lean Cuisine, Hot Pockets and Lean Pockets, along with organic items from United Natural Foods, Stacy's and Kashi. Whereas a traditional c-store will carry one variety of an item such as canned soup, the newest P.O.D. Market offers different brands and multiple varieties of an item.

While much attention is placed on having the right



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product mix, the store's design is a point of differentiation as well. All P.O.D. Markets feature wood laminate flooring, a stone-textured effect on the walls, pendant lighting and window graphics representative of the campus and community. One of the graphics at the University Village store shows a Navy ship, since the city of Norfolk is home to the Atlantic Fleet; another is of the school's marching band.

"All of these elements give our store a warm and inviting atmosphere, while providing a variety of convenient food options for our customers," Wilson said. "[When customers enter the new Village P.O.D. Market for the first time], I want them to say 'wow,' and feel like they are entering a whole new realm for convenience on campus."

Since its opening, the University Village community has taken to the store, and sales are increasing steadily, Wilson added. "Customers like the look and atmosphere of the P.O.D. and they like having the store right in their neighborhood," he said.

For comments, please contact [Linda Lisanti](mailto:Linda.Lisanti@stagnitomedia.com), Senior Editor, at Lisanti@stagnitomedia.com.



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