

PRACTICE WHAT YOU TEACH

"The idea is to use technology to make everyone's life easier," says Mike Finnell, IT Coordinator.

The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College in Philadelphia makes expansive use of display technology to prepare the chefs and hotel managers of the future.

At a Glance

COLLEGE: The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College

LOCATION: Philadelphia

FOUNDED: 1974

STUDENTS: 500 (mainly 18- to 22-year-olds from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania)

DEGREES: Associate and bachelor of science in culinary arts, pastry arts, restaurant management and hotel management

ABOUT: The country's first private college to specialize in fine dining and luxury hospitality careers, the school offers an interactive educational experience in the University City district of Philadelphia, one of the most bustling urban collegiate environments in the nation. Many of its graduates begin their careers in managerial positions.



“Everyone here is dedicated to giving the next generation of chefs the tools and experiences they need to succeed.”

— Chef Instructor Tom Tirendi

Mike Finnell has a straightforward approach to running technology programs at a culinary arts and hospitality college.

“If we’re going to teach hospitality, we have to preach hospitality,” says Finnell, IT coordinator of The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College in Philadelphia.

To do that, Finnell works closely with college leaders, faculty and staff to integrate technology into every aspect of the student experience at school, which offers four degrees, in culinary and pastry arts, and restaurant and hotel management.

“The idea is to use technology to make everyone’s life easier,” Finnell says. “I want to make it so students aren’t working hard to find something. They’re simply trying to learn something.”

Nearly 30 Samsung digital signs, deployed throughout the campus, offer updates on daily culinary events, schedule changes and lifestyle information. The displays also provide directions around campus. (See “*Visual Recipe for Creativity*.”)

Using Samsung MagicInfo Pro software, the IT team and

administrative staff can publish new content to the digital signs several times a day. MagicInfo Pro does not require any special bandwidth management because the updated content publishes to the screens only after a change is made — “as opposed to constantly streaming to them,” Finnell explains.

Plans also are under way to deploy a touch-screen information kiosk that will display interactive maps, making it easy for visitors to find their way around campus.

“The digital signs are really a fast and efficient way to disperse information,” says Valery Snisarenko, the school’s director of marketing. “They are everywhere.”

The Main Course

All of the general education classrooms have Epson projectors. Plus, all six teaching kitchens have Lenovo notebooks mounted on adjustable arms that tether to Epson overhead projectors. These units can display videos, websites and PowerPoint presentations, for instance, as an easier means of demonstration.

The technology makes a tremendous difference in the learning experience, says Tom Tirendi, a chef instructor and 1998 graduate of The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College.

“When I was in school, we had access to the Internet, but we had to go to the library,” he says. “Now, we have computers with Internet access right in the kitchen. We can look up recipes on the fly, and I can display my PowerPoint presentations. It gives a lecture much more power. Students can either view the lecture on the projector screen or follow along on their tablets. Everything is right at their fingertips.”

Jordan Fuller, a 23-year-old restaurant management major from Philadelphia, says all of the school’s technology makes the campus environment more appealing.

“The digital signs show prospective students who visit the campus that we are cutting-edge and modern,” he says. “It keeps people in touch and shows our capabilities.”

Ready for Service

A major reason for the school’s focus on using technology stems from the leadership of its president, Daniel Liberatoscioli. He’s always thinking up creative ways to deploy technology to make the campus hospitable to students and visitors alike, Snisarenko says.

A prime example? The coming use of displays for a spice

and herb wall in the back hallway of the culinary building was his brainchild. Rather than let the high-traffic area serve solely as a route from class to class, Liberatoscioli suggested installing interactive kiosks and digital displays to make an effective and fun learning environment for students.

"I would have to say that the entire process of deploying the displays across campus has been much easier with his backing," Snisarenko says. "Once people saw that he was such a strong advocate for the technology, just about everyone else got on board."

She adds, "CDW's help also made the whole experience pretty painless."

Finnell credits CDW for bringing in technologists from its partner Samsung to discuss options for using digital displays, which really paved the way for all the unique uses of the technology on campus — from their deployment in hallways and stairwells to their use in instructional kitchens and restaurants.

Working with CDW "really takes a load off of me," Finnell says. "I don't have to spend hours combing through Google for a part or searching the Internet to find out about the latest products. I just tell CDW I need 'xyz,' and they get me the technology I need."

Mike Arbanas, the CDW account manager who worked closely with Finnell, says one of the keys to the project's success was the selection of Samsung as the digital sign provider. "The ease of use of Samsung's MagicInfo management software was a big selling point," he says.

"I can't tell you how many times we go down a path with a certain manufacturer and then have to retrofit in the middle of the project," Arbanas says. "The Samsung displays met the school's initial requirements, met the price point they were looking for, plus offered the scalability and flexibility they will need as their usage increases over time."

A Digital Repast

Integrating technology into the curriculum meshes well with the school's overall approach to preparing students for work in the real world, Finnell says.

"One thing you have to understand is that the students are not learning in a sterile kitchen," he says. "They are not just baking 50 rolls and throwing them out."

Every class feeds off the work that a previous class has completed, Finnell explains. The rolls that pastry students bake at 6 a.m. are organized by a production class in the early afternoon and finally served that evening by a restaurant operations class.

Visual Recipe for Creativity

The digital signs spread throughout campus at The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College are an integral part of the school's technology setup. When it completes its rollout in early 2013, the school will have 30 Samsung digital signs and two Epson projectors supporting its various digital signage applications.

IT Coordinator Mike Finnell notes that his team sets strict on/off schedules for all the devices so that they're powered up only when the campus or the restaurants are in operation.

Here's a breakdown of the school's digital displays:

- **Samsung SyncMaster 400DXn with thin client hardware:** Ten of these 40-inch screens support seven electronic bulletin boards, two main reception picture frames and a fireplace screen. The school controls them using Samsung MagicInfo Pro software on a dedicated server over an Ethernet network.
- **Samsung UE55A large-format LCD (4):** These 55-inch screens, connected using DVI cables and Samsung's built-in video wall functionality, form one large screen or portrait wall. A small bookshelf PC, running Microsoft Windows 7 and PowerPoint that's accessible via Virtual Network Computing software, powers the wall. As the false window covering on the UE55A was secured into place, the IT team ran infrared repeaters to all of the screens so they could modify settings without having to pull the room apart as requirements and events change.
- **Samsung UE55A large-format LCD (1):** The configuration for this 55-inch unit is the same as for the video wall, except that it's a single monitor instead of four linked together. This unit serves as a mock picture frame in the same restaurant as the video wall.
- **Epson PowerLite 1950 projector (2):** The projectors display a slide show on two large, otherwise barren walls in the stairwells of the school's culinary building. The school packages the slide shows on thumb drives using Epson EasyMP Slide Converter, which means they can be set to play automatically when the projectors are powered on.
- **Samsung SyncMaster ME32B (12):** Five of these 32-inch digital signs will become a picture gallery in the main hall of Allison Mansion. Among the remaining seven, two will be used in kiosks and five in an installation at another of the school's buildings. With the exception of the screens earmarked for the kiosks, all will run slide shows contained on thumb drives using MagicInfo Lite.
- **Samsung SyncMaster ME32B (3):** Two of these displays will be used for the school's interactive spice and herb wall in the back hallway of the culinary building, and the third will be used as an information kiosk. The hallway displays run MagicInfo Lite and have their own onboard storage.



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To immerse its students in a realistic culinary environment, the school has four working restaurants and a pastry café that are open to the public. A walk through the school's entrance at the Allison Mansion brings visitors to the pastry shop and the Great Chefs of Philadelphia restaurant, which features fine dining. In the school's atrium, a European-style piazza is home to the International Bistro, which serves world cuisine; the American Heartland, which offers steaks and fish; and finally, the Italian Trattoria.

Cooking with One-to-One

Upon arrival, each student at The Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College receives a tablet computer with 16 gigabytes of memory and a Wi-Fi card (with the option of upgrading to 4G wireless).

To give those 500 tablets and other personal devices network access, the school deployed Aruba wireless switches with built-in load balancing, rogue detection and fault tolerance, as well as roughly 16 access points throughout the school's three main buildings.

All of the general education classrooms, restaurants and student kitchens now provide Wi-Fi access. The wireless network also helps Finnell more effectively manage the three to four personal devices that most students bring to campus.

"Just about everyone has a smartphone, and they all want to be connected with one another," IT Coordinator Mike Finnell says.

"People today just expect that level of connectivity."

"I don't have to spend hours combing through Google for a part or searching the Internet to find out about the latest products. I just tell CDW I need 'xyz,' and they get me the technology I need."

— IT Coordinator Mike Finnell

"Working in the restaurants helps students get experience in the industry," Finnell says. "We host a lot of events, weddings and private parties."

The display technology plays an important role in helping the school and the students refine the many events with creative embellishments. For example, in the Great Chefs restaurant, four Samsung UE55 digital displays form a video wall that serves up content customized to each event.

"The technology lets us create dynamic environments that are related to the food being served," Snisarenko says. "We can have it be whatever we want it to be, whenever we want it." A vegetarian meal might have an agricultural backdrop, for example, while a fish or lobster dinner sports a tropical or seashore motif.

Fuller calls the video wall a great feature. "It changes through the course of the meal and, depending on the event that night, might give people the sense that they are dining in London or Paris."

Along with the video wall in the Great Chefs restaurant, the school has deployed digital signs mounted in picture frames throughout the other restaurants and in all the reception areas, creating a video art gallery. Content can change daily via MagicInfo based on the day's events.

"Our approach is very progressive," Tirendi says. "We do meals for the public all week and have a great following in the neighborhood. Everyone here is dedicated to giving the next generation of chefs the tools and experiences they need to succeed."

For more information, visit: cdw.com/digitalsignage



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