

FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT

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36 Undercounter Warewashers
Come Of Age

43 Cheddar's Casual Cafe
Designs For Efficiency

By Janice Cha, Contributing Editor

Take a proven multiunit kitchen design, one that's already cranking out high volumes of good food. Now make changes that will boost production speed and quality without changing kitchen footprint or equipment package cost. That was the challenge facing Executive Chef and Culinary Research and Development Director Robert Pesch and his team at Cheddar's Casual Cafe, the Irving, Texas-based chain of neighborhood-style restaurants.

Cheddar's new prototype kitchen, which debuted this summer at restaurants in Sanford and West Melbourne, Fla., is expected to boost per-unit volume capacities by at least 10%, using an updated equipment package cost kept within 1% of the previous kitchen cost.

"Our goals were to maximize productivity, making sure we had the right equipment in the right spots, and that it would be dependable," Pesch says.

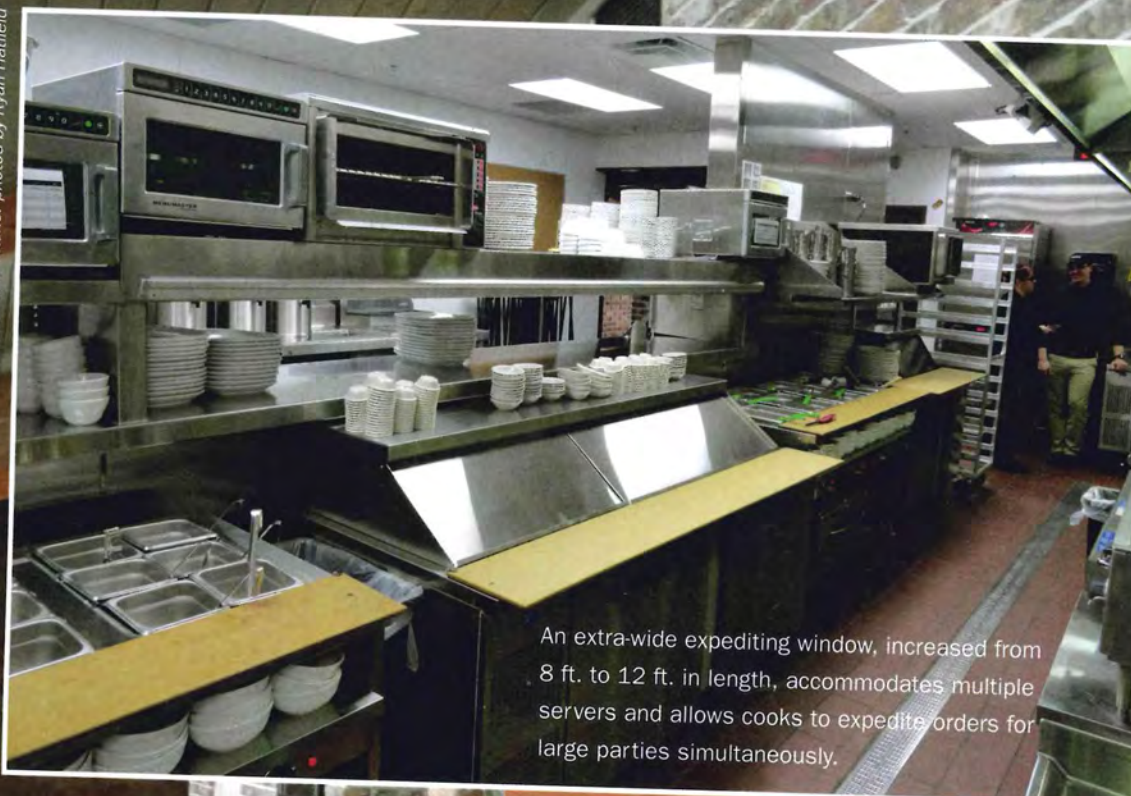
Pesch, Design and Construction V.P. Ryan Hatfield and Purchasing and Administration Sr.V.P. Rick Payne spearheaded Cheddar's redesign. The team worked with equipment dealer TriMark SS Kemp, Cleveland, and partnered with suppliers to come up with new equipment solutions.

A hands-on type, Pesch is a regular visitor at all Dallas-area Cheddar's locations, where he talks to managers, cooks and kitchen staff about how to improve operations. "Things look different on paper than they do in real life," Pesch explains, pointing out the pocket tape measure he brings to most of his kitchen visits. "You have to compare blueprints with actual kitchens, since operators often may have already moved a piece of equipment a few inches."



Photo by Kevin Marple

Kitchen and interior photos by Ryan Hatfield



An extra-wide expediting window, increased from 8 ft. to 12 ft. in length, accommodates multiple servers and allows cooks to expedite orders for large parties simultaneously.

SPECS

MENU/SEGMENT: Casual dining

HEADQUARTERS: Irving, Texas

FOUNDED: 1979

NUMBER OF UNITS: 146 units in 25 states

SIZE: 8,000 sq. ft.

SEATING: 288 seats

2014 PLANS: 12 expected openings
(company-owned and franchised)

EQUIPMENT DEALER: TriMark SS Kemp,
Cleveland

WEB: cheddars.com

Cheddar's Kitchen Layout

The Cheddar's prototype kitchen in Sanford covers 3,500 sq. ft. and is equipped to produce from scratch all of the sauces, dressings, sides, entrees and desserts filling the restaurant's four-page menu. The kitchen layout can best be described by a series of nested L-shaped work areas.

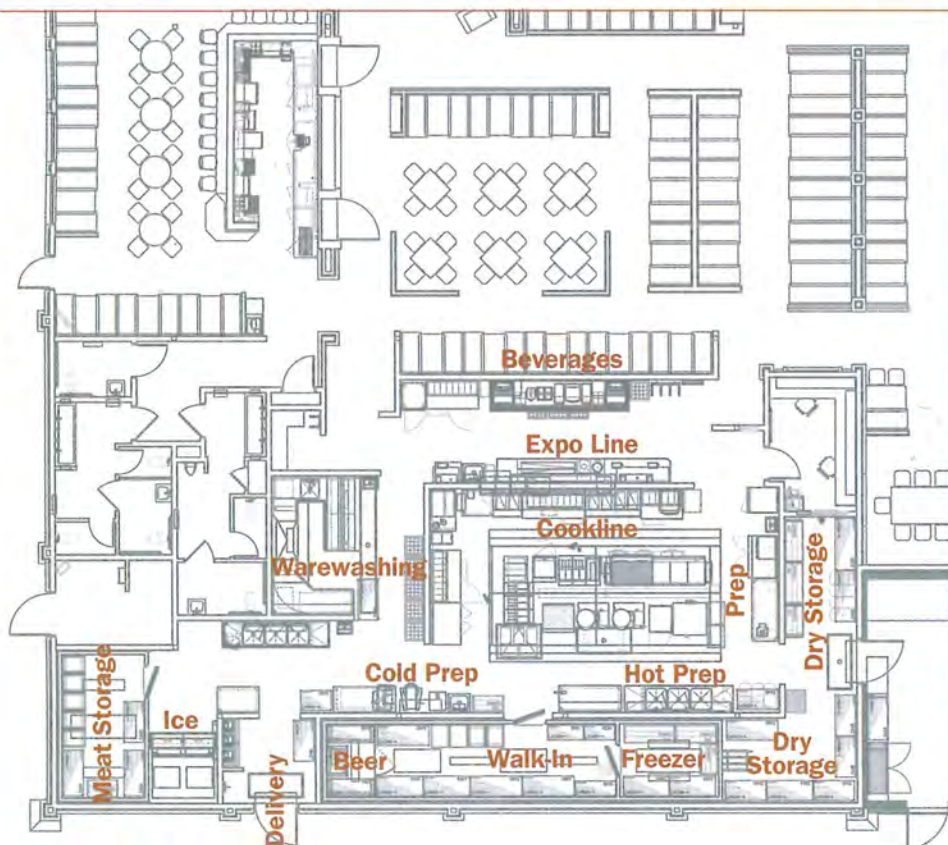
The biggest L-shaped area consists of the walk-in and dry storage forming the back wall and one side wall of the kitchen. The ice machine and bin, delivery entrance and mop sink area also are positioned on the back wall.

Food prep takes place on tables

equipped with choppers, mixers and slicers along the long back wall, along with the 3-compartment sinks used for cleaning produce before stowing it in walk-ins. Additional food-prep action takes place on the short side wall with another prep table, a new combi oven and a warming box at the end.

The heart and heat of Cheddar's kitchen sits under a 450-sq.-ft., four-zone exhaust hood island. Cooks use a six-burner range for hot food prep along with a pair of tilting kettles, a rib oven and a convection oven. On the opposite side, closest to the pass-through window

Cheddar's Casual Cafe, Sanford, Fla.



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EQUIPMENT

HOT/COLD PREP

ACP microwave oven
Alto-Shaam combi oven
Cres Cor mobile heated cabinet
Eagle Group work tables
FMP timers
Globe food mixer, slicer
Groen/Unified Brands
tilting kettles
Hatco countertop oven
Hobart/ITW FEG salad dryer
Robot Coupe USA food processor
Victory/Ali Group reach-in freezer

COOKLINE/SALAD LINE

Alto-Shaam cook & hold oven
Avtec/Unified Brands
utility raceway
Blodgett/Middleby oven
Pitco/Middleby fryer
Randell/Unified Brands chef
stand, custom dump-station,
worktop freezer counter,
hot food tables, mega-top prep
table, undercounter freezer,
work table/batter station
Vulcan/ITW FEG counter-model
charbroiler, griddle, hotplate,
mobile fryer filter
Wells/Middleby countertop
griddle, warming drawer
CaptiveAire hoods

STORAGE/ WAREWASHING/MISC.

Advance Tabco handsink
Follett ice bin
Kolpak/Manitowoc walk-in beer/
back up cooler, walk-in cooler/
freezer combo
Manitowoc ice maker

EXPO/BEVERAGES

Bunn-O-Matic tea brewer
Silver King dipping cabinet
Carter-Hoffmann/Middleby nacho
chip warmer
Hatco heat lamps



serving the expo table, are a flattop griddle and charbroiler and two fryers. On the hood island's short end—opposite the salad station and also handy to the expo table—are hot wells for fried items, a larger fryer bank and a breading station.

Last are the expo line and extra-long pass-through window that can accommodate multiple servers at once. The area features a line of cold and hot prep tables with shelving above to hold plates within reach. On the server side of the expo line is the beverage station and a work table.

Efficiency Squared

Pesch's team examined Cheddar's existing kitchens and evaluated equipment and stations in terms of productivity/capacity, flexibility and food safety and quality.

The first order of business was boosting Cheddar's productivity and capacity.

Cold storage earned a 40% increase by adding refrigeration to less-used areas of the kitchen and upsizing existing units (from a 40-in.-wide reach-in to an 80-in. unit, for example).

Above, a view of the cookline (r.) and cold prep tables (l.) for salads and more. Below, volume production for baking, roasting and making scratch sauces and soups.



Expanding the expo's pass-through length from 8-ft. to 12-ft. wide, now allows the salad-station team to add completed plates to the window directly. "The longer window will help us serve multiple large parties more efficiently," Pesch says. Plates and smallwares are kept along the expo line, saving steps for servers and warewashers.

Although the team tested larger, high-efficiency fryers, "we opted to add a fourth fryer," Pesch explains. "That way we can designate fryers for certain products. Dedicated fryers use less oil and make it easier to maintain required oil temperatures—both of which help through-put."

In at least one case, a larger piece of equipment was re-



quired. "We spec'd a rib oven 50% larger than the old ones, to better keep up with demand," Pesch says.

And whenever possible, flexibility. "We added a combi oven in place of a specialty steamer/microwave oven," Pesch says. "We weren't satisfied with how the steamer was treating our products, plus it was a single-use item: It could only reheat. The combi lets us do much more."

Next, the team examined cold product storage—walk-ins and cold prep tables. They realized a simple swap between the raw-meat storage and beer storage would reduce chances of cross-contamination and opportunities for pilferage. Now, proteins are kept in a dedicated cooler. Beer is stored in the main walk-in, behind a lockable gate.

Tweaking prep tables took more effort. "Product in cold prep units on the cookline wasn't staying as cold as we would have liked," Pesch says. Cheddar's worked with a

manufacturer partner to identify units that feature separate compressors for top and bottom compartments and are capable of wafting a cold blanket of air over the product.

Additionally, the team upgraded to cold drawers, getting rid of doors. "A door gets in the way when it swings open," Pesch says.

Getting Hot Water Right

The team also scrutinized restaurant systems. Hot water, especially, has been a top priority.

"Cheddar's had been specifying tankless water heaters for more than five years, usually four per location," Hat-

field says. "Because we pushed water heaters so hard, the failure rate was huge. They'd last two to three years, then would go bad."

"Tankless units work well for smaller volume locations in warmer locations," Hatfield says. "But given the volume of people we serve, and the amount of scratch cooking we do, and our many restaurants in colder states, tankless units couldn't keep up with demand."

During winter, when incoming water temperatures are low, tankless units can struggle to heat high volumes of water to 140°F. In several cases, the tankless units so restricted water flow that flames would burn the copper water pipe until it broke. At least one restaurant suffered catastrophic flooding until the manager could figure out how to shut off the main water supply valve.

The team found the solution in two 94%-efficiency water-heating tanks, which now are being specified for all new Cheddar's locations. As for existing restaurants, "we're slowly retrofitting in tank water heaters where necessary," Hatfield says. "The existing tankless heaters are usually installed on mezzanine-level shelves, so you can't just swap in a 100-gal. tank. We have to totally rearrange and replumb the mechanical room to make space."

Additional tweaks to future Cheddar's kitchens, including some of the 12 new units slated for '14, feature adding a pasta cooker on the cookline and new cooking platforms, such as sauté stations, for additional menu flexibility, Pesch says.

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