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FOOD Management



PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR TODAY'S CHALLENGES



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Stellar Achievers

1997 IFMA SILVER PLATE AWARD WINNERS

1997 SILVER



PLATE WINNER

Carol Sherman

New York University Medical Center

In a healthcare industry downsized by mergers and buy-outs, Carol Sherman, R.D., tries to be first in line to grab any fall-out opportunities to expand her foodservice operation from its base at New York University Medical Center (NYUMC).

In an industry hysterically cutting costs and eliminating services, Sherman considers it her mission to design and implement new services that will increase revenues.

In an industry with a reputation for

bland, boring food, she likes to cater big bashes in the hospital for high-rollers and celebrity gourmet associations.

In an industry overrun by contractors, she's on a one-woman commando mission to help independents stay independent.

And in an industry where many respected, long-time directors are losing jobs, Sherman's top management team is convinced her assertiveness in landing new business will give them job opportunities as well as job security.

Quite a package of achievements. And just what it took to earn Carol Sherman the 1997 IFMA Silver Plate Award for Healthcare.

From her office at NYUMC, within eyesight of Manhattan's East River and earshot of the

thundering traffic of Franklin D. Roosevelt Bridge,

Sherman heads a foodservice operation that sprawls along eight blocks of prime Manhattan East Side real estate. From this base, she feeds patients in 1,400 beds of three hospital facilities as well as 1,664 graduate and medical students, 4,268 full and



IN THE LATE 80's: Sherman (second from left) and four physicians from Beth Israel were guest speakers on a Nutrition and Health program sponsored by the medical center. During her five years at Beth Israel, Sherman expanded the foodservice department's reach by implementing shared services agreements with three other facilities.

part-time medical teaching faculty, and administrators and visitors.

She first visited the Center in 1990 as an undercover consultant at the request of hospital administrators who wanted a third-party review of foodservices. The department was contracted out at the time and Sherman's final report detailed management inefficiencies as well as a great untapped potential for cost containment.

In a classic version of "You think it's so bad? You fix it," the contractor was ousted and Sherman was hired to come aboard in August 1991, build her own management team, and cure the patient.

"NYUMC was impossible to resist because it is such a prestigious New York teaching hospital and there was so much that could be done with foodservices," she says.

Throughout her tenure, Sherman has made foodservices a shining ex-

Photography by Laurent Gault



***Her customers love her food,
her bosses love her numbers
and her managers love the
opportunities she provides.***

• H I G H L I G H T S •

Scope of services: \$11.5 million foodservice operation serving 11,000 meals daily, two-thirds of which are non-patient meals. Operates three cafeterias and three satellite foodservice stations and does extensive catering. Annual revenues: \$5 million. FTEs: 225. Management staff: 32.

Cost savings: \$14 million over five years.

Increased revenues: Catering, up \$450,000 last year, generates \$1.5 million annually. Contracts with other facilities produce \$400,000 in revenues annually.

Multi-facility management: Operates foodservices for the NYU School of Medicine and The Hospital for Joint Disease. Provides management support for The New York Downtown Hospital. In previous position at Beth Israel Medical Center, initiated satellite, shared-service program that brought foodservice to the center's day treatment programs, nursing home and the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.

Food quality: Hired 10 culinary arts graduates, including a European-trained, hotel-experienced pastry chef, after arriving at NYUMC. Opened in-house bakeshop. Requires culinary applicants to cook in front of managers, who taste the finished product as part of screening process.

Mentoring: Trained and directed 12 foodservice managers who have since gone on to become directors of their own departments.

Employee morale: Initiated a formal, annual awards program in which employees' family members are invited as guests and an annual Caribbean Celebration Day featuring live music, island food and various hospital executives, including Sherman, working as servers.

Patient services: Expanded patient menu from two to 11 entrees per meal. Retained such patient favorites as poached salmon and boneless chicken breast. Entrees include seafood newberg, veal marengo, tabbouleh salad, Moroccan

lamb stew and couscous, and a luncheon seafood salad of baby shrimp and crabmeat in a lemon dressing with cilantro.

Cafeteria operations: Increased revenues last year by \$700,000 in extremely limited, 180-seat space. Menu features custom-made deli-style sandwiches, three types of pizza, rotating daily hot bars (Mexican, Japanese, Chinese pasta or vegetarian).

Physical plant renovation: Installed cook-chill production system, which expanded patient entree selections and provided capacity to produce food for other healthcare facilities.

Medical/graduate student services: Established meal plan and debit card system which shortened lines and increased revenues by 30% annually.

Employee training: Encouraged enrollment in university courses, cross-trained to increase productivity and flexibility. Established nine-month training program for the developmentally challenged that enrolls 10 at one time and has graduated 36, 30 of whom are currently employed in foodservice industry positions.

Food manufacturer/vendor/supplier relationships: Worked with industry members to develop new products and services for healthcare. Speaks frequently to manufacturer and industry groups on the healthcare market.

Industry spokesperson: Established source for consumer and trade press on healthcare as well as food production trends and developments.

Professional presenter: Frequent speaker at industry events on such topics as cost containment and marketing.

Association contributions: As president of National Society for Healthcare Foodservice Management (HFMA) in 1995-96, developed on-line services, created publications on business planning and multi-department management and grew membership by 30 percent.

Executive Chef Patrick Smet-Chevron lays out a sampling of his products for Sherman. His creations are "to die for," she says.

ample of what an independent operation can accomplish. She slashed the annual operating budget by \$2.8 million, and over the next five years, increased revenues by \$1.5 million. (Catering revenues alone are up by \$450,000 annually and cafeteria revenues by \$700,000.)

She improved morale, productivity and cross-training among a unionized staff. She produced catered events that featured food of such high quality and dazzling inventiveness that they forever changed how guests view hospital foodservice.

She took on two additional hospitals as foodservice clients, delivered balance sheets that bubble over with black ink, invited industry representatives to NYUMC to experience the cutting edge of foodservice trends, and established a very front-and-



center profile with the news media. Sherman tells everyone who asks—and some who don't—that

the key to her success is her management team (see sidebar on page 58), which she built from the ground

By Carolyn Schuster

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up after her arrival at NYUMC.

From her previous job at Beth Israel, she brought along only Sheli Levine, a computer whiz who is assistant director of finance and management information systems, and John Hufnal, an equipment specialist. She also re-hired Mary Burns McKenzie, with whom she had worked previously and who had just returned to New York.

McKenzie reviewed the tray line and announced to Sherman that "it is so slow you could lay down on the line between trays." One of the two lines was immediately shut down.

The other top team members were new to NYUMC and to Sherman. They are hand-picked, intensely loyal and diversely-talented. Sherman is no one's idea of an easy boss. She can be demanding, badgering and implacable. She can be uncompromising and relentless. But, hey, this is New York City.

Besides, Sherman also has an established reputation for leading the people who work for her to new heights of professional success and personal accomplishment. Foodservice professionals have been known to take lower-level positions on Sherman's team than they could get elsewhere because they want the support and creative energy she engenders.

"We all are intense," she admits of the people she recruited. "I react quickly. If something needs to be done, I hit on it. We all want to do what is necessary to succeed. We also are forward-thinking. None of us feels like what we are doing today is the limit of what we can do.

"Of course, it took us awhile to become this cohesive," she laughs.

Sherman has a gourmand's tastes and standards for the food she eats and she doesn't like to compromise on the food she serves, either. A recent example is her determination to save cold poached salmon. "We have it on the patient menu and it is really superb," she says, "but it is an expense."

To save the salmon, Sherman worked with an equipment manufacturer to create a prototype breakfast cart that is wheeled along patient floors stocked with an a la carte selection of three varieties of freshly-baked muffins, a selection of instant hot and cold cereals, fresh fruit, juice and a few hard-cooked eggs.

"We're saving \$175,000 a year in labor costs by replacing the break-



Luc Rosier, first cook (at right), dazzles Sherman and Greg Chrysler, production coordinator, with his speed and dexterity at the grill.

fast service with the portable breakfast carts," says Sherman. "And the patients are happier with the coffee because it is hotter than before."

The savings saved the salmon.

"Picky? You say I'm picky? I'm not picky," Sherman berates a manager, laughing again because she doesn't dare reject his accurate one-word description of her.

"We've all been in trouble with Carol at times," says Chris Lord, assistant director for production. "When that happens, we coast along on the bottom floor for a few days before we move back up on the pedestal."

As an example, Lord, who ran a \$10-million food and beverage operation at a major New York hotel before joining Sherman's team, tells a story of Patrick Smet-Chevron, the executive pastry chef. French-trained, Smet-Chevron's resume includes stints at New York's Mark Hotel and Tavern on the Green.

It seems that one day early in his NYUMC career, Smet-Chevron made brownies. "Carol tasted them and didn't like them," recalls Lord. Sherman wasn't sure that a French-trained pastry chef could do the oatmeal cookies and brownies she needs. "I told Patrick about it," re-

Managing to succeed. From left, front, moving counterclockwise: Sherman, Chris Lord, Phyllis Kaskel, Mary Burns McKenzie, Sheli Levine, Chet Ostrowski, Herbert Dyer, Jr. and Steve Archuleta.





Sherman catches up on the steps of New York's Public Library with her children, 19-year old twins Jocelyn and Scott, New York University students.

calls Lord. "He went to work on the Internet and he came up with 40 brownie recipes from all over the country. He walked into Carol's office and put them all on her desk and said, "You want brownies? I can give you brownies. But you've got to tell me what you want."

Today, Smet-Chevron is coming up on his second anniversary at NYUMC. Sherman showcases him and his intricate, defensible creations at catered events and spends up to two hours on her home treadmill at night when she samples too many of his treats during the day.

Sherman's home, a turn-of-the-century Connecticut house, where she lives with her attorney husband, Neil, is a world away from the hectic, frenetic pace of Manhattan. It also is a world away from her modest middle-class Queens upbringing.

Sherman says her parents encouraged and expected her to be successful and able to support herself in whatever career she chose. She always loved the city and the theaters and museums her family visited and to which she took her own children in the five years she spent at home with them.

Sherman operates full-throttle on New York time with a New York energy and a New York impatience. That's why it is such a surprise to learn that she earned her undergrad-

uate degree in food and nutrition during four years spent at the University of Texas in Austin.

She says she picked the school because it was affordable and because, like many young high school graduates, "I wanted to try something different, go someplace new. I admit I was a real novelty in Texas."

After graduation, Sherman took a city exam for a clinical nutritionist's job and went to work at Queens General, because her mother had friends who worked there. From there, it was on to Mt. Sinai as a manager.

Sherman did consulting work while her children were young, but it has been the past 11 years in the foodservice directors' positions at Beth Israel and NYUMC that have catapulted her into prominence.

"I love the diversity of New York," she says. "I love the pace and I thrive on it. It works for me. I like being this busy because it's the lifestyle I've chosen."

Sherman's ambition and energy level are a good match for what is

happening in healthcare. It is her conviction that with mergers, acquisitions and shared service agreements happening as fast as they are, those who act quickly and decisively now will be the players in the future.

"To relax is to die," she says. "There will be no free-standing healthcare foodservice facilities in the future—not just in New York but anywhere. There will be either shared services, like we started at Beth Israel, or merged facilities, or just total buy-outs.

"In this environment, there are so many 'what if's'. What if one of the merged facilities has the better foodservice operation? What if one has excess production capacity? What if one has cook-chill and the other doesn't? What if one has a kosher kitchen? What if they have different management philosophies?

"NYUMC is a great place to be because we have a stable, proven management team in place, lots of creativity, and a determination to grow. We are going to have more areas to manage in the future." ■

How to Assemble A Successful Management Team

An impressively large number of healthcare foodservice professionals who are leaders in the industry—prominent directors, association officers and award winners—have served time on Sherman's management teams. Her success in building these teams is usually cited by anyone asked to assess her strengths and success.

Here are some of the rules she follows in building successful teams.

- **Start with culinary experts.** Sherman has 10 culinary arts graduates on staff. "If you've got people who know and love food, they can advise you on controlling costs without sacrificing quality. They also can help you increase revenues. We increased our catering revenues by \$450,000 last year and the public exposure and reputation our catered events have given us was incredible."
- **Move people around.** Sherman likes to move management people from project to project, among departments, and even between facilities. "It's tempting to keep someone in place if they're doing a good job, but they'll be more valuable to you in the long run if they have a variety of experience and assignments." Cross-training also increases a department's flexibility in assigning personnel and exposes employees to new areas for which they might have untapped talent.
- **Get input and commitment early in project development.** "To deliver a project, the whole senior management team as well as the entire staff has to buy into the project. I can't deliver it without them."
- **When they're ready to fly on their own, let them go.** Sherman has a reputation not only for training good foodservice professionals, but for recommending them for other jobs once they're ready for higher-level positions. Her well-honed connections within the industry put her in a position to find out when top-level jobs open and she's quick to share the openings with her team.