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RETAIL

URI convenience store wins national honors

By Susan A. Baird
PBN Web Editor

KINGSTON – A national trade group for college dining halls has bestowed its "Best in the Business" award for product mix and variety on the University of Rhode Island's Corner Store at Hope Commons.

It was the only such award this year from the National Association of College and University Food Services, which also honors college convenience stores for excellence in other categories, such as marketing and merchandising, and food-service application.

"When I received the call telling us we won the 'Best in the Business' award, I ran and shouted to everyone 'We won, we won, we won!'" recalled Kathleen Gianquitti, director of dining services at URI. She said the trade group was so impressed by the Corner Store, it is sending a film crew to document the operation.

Offerings include fresh popcorn and other snacks, organic and gluten-free foods and health and beauty supplies. "From prepared entrees ... to make-your-own-cereal, nuts and dried fruit combinations and convenience items, we have what our busy students need in a warm and dynamic environment," Gianquitti said. "Want a hot dog, a roller stick, cold beverage or a hot cup of coffee? We have them. Need some balloons for a friend? We have them. Want to purchase from local merchants and farms? We have Rhody Fresh milk, eggs and cheese, and you can select our Monster Cookies from the Cookie Place."

The Corner Store first opened 12 years ago in a 400-square-foot space at the old Hope Dining Hall, which was razed to make way for Hope Commons. Its new location, a 1,500-square-foot ground-floor space, is open seven days and 84 hours per week.

"Sales have increased from an average of \$2,100 per day when we opened in September to an average of \$3,046 in February," Gianquitti said. "We attribute this

44 percent increase in daily sales to our ability to service our students, faculty and staff with a wide variety of products."

But the staff continues to look for ways to improve. "We are already looking into new products for next year," said Sharon Valliere, food-service administrator for URI dining services and the Corner Store's manager.

Hope Commons also is home to Main Fare, the university's main dining facility, and Rhody Market, a coffee, ice cream and pizza shop that entices visitors with a fireplace and plasma-screen TVs.

The subject of much publicity since its opening last summer, Hope Commons has attracted visits by officials at other institutions planning new facilities, including FM Global insurance, Brown University, Rhode Island Hospital, Northeastern University, Georgia Tech, the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of St. Thomas, Minn. "Georgia Tech was so impressed that it visited twice, once with a contingent of students," Ginaquitti said. "They all remarked about how attractive it was and how it doesn't remind them of the stereotypical dining experience.

"Hope Commons looks like something you would find in an upscale mall."

For additional news and information from the University of Rhode Island, visit www.uri.edu.

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URI DEPT. OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING / MICHAEL SALERNO

KATHLEEN GIANQUITTI, right, URI dining services director, and Sharon Valliere, manager of the URI Corner Store, display some of the many foods the convenience store sells.



URI DEPT. OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING / MICHAEL SALERNO

THE AWARD from the National Association of College and University Food Services lauds the Corner Store as "the best in the business" for product mix and variety. It hangs by the entrance of the shop, on the ground floor of URI's new Hope Commons.



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FRESHMAN Tamara Faddish, of Hillsborough, N.J., grabs a carton of milk from a cooler at the store, which stocks local products including Rhody Fresh milk, eggs and cheese.

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