

Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport overcame daunting challenges to quickly open a new hospital, making room for the anticipated COVID-19 patient surge.

Opening a Healthcare Facility in the Midst of a Pandemic

The stresses that have been put on the North American healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic have been well documented: overworked staffs, insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) and finding space for a massive influx of patients, to name just a few. Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport is a full-service health system with a 452-bed hospital in Shreveport and a 244-bed hospital in Monroe, La., both of which faced many of those challenges. Ochsner LSU Health's St. Mary Medical Center (SMMC) in Shreveport was under renovation to provide 330 additional patient beds in a third location in the coming years. However, when the pandemic hit, the Louisiana state government issued guidance to healthcare institutions to improve their surge capacity to handle the influx of COVID patients. At that time, New Orleans was a COVID hot spot, driving the sense of urgency to increase beds in other Louisiana areas. In March of 2020, Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport announced plans to increase the ICU capacity at its main Shreveport facility by repurposing the SMMC location for use by its labor, delivery and neonatal and pediatric intensive care units.

The timeline for getting the St. Mary Medical Center operation up and running was tight and getting a patient foodservice operation in place was of critical importance. Since there was no operating kitchen and meal delivery system in place at SMMC, Ochsner LSU Health made the decision to prepare the meals at their Academic Medical Center and truck the food to SMMC for patient meal service. Eric Lyons,

Corporate Director of Standards and Innovation for ABM Healthcare, the hospital's foodservice contractor, describes the timing for the project as, "incredibly compressed. Normally we go into an existing hospital and we typically have 90 days. Here we only had five weeks."

Tasked with getting the foodservice operation up and running quickly, ABM's first call was to Aladdin. Aladdin has been a major part of ABM's expansion in healthcare.

ABM explained the urgency of the situation and the Aladdin team quickly swung into action. "We needed equipment with the ability to keep hot food hot and cold food cold," says Eric Kotheimer, CFSP, Director of Culinary Projects for ABM.

Michael Hils, North American AMS Manager for Aladdin, developed a proposal for the SMMC location. Traditionally, the Aladdin team would have presented the proposal face-to-face, but in true COVID lockdown style, "we did the bulk of it over the phone and in conference calls," Hils says. "We walked them through a day in the life of their operation. How [the food] would be received, how it would be prepared, pickup, transportation...we went through the whole timeline."

To keep the food at the proper temperature during its 3-mile ride from the main facility in Shreveport to St. Mary Medical Center, Hils suggested an Aladdin Convect-Rite[®] Select system. Convect-Rite Select carts are lightweight yet extremely durable — an important consideration given the fact that they'd be shuttled between the two campuses. Since the carts contain no electrical components, staff can easily clean and sanitize the units. For active heat and refrigeration, the carts are paired with the Aladdin

Convect-Rite 3 INSIGHT docking station. Fully insulated, the carts are suitable for transporting both hot and cold food items. Patented airflow technology helps maintain proper temperature, providing an important solution to hospital meal delivery. The docking station remains stationary, which helps eliminate the risk of damage from it being moved on a truck or through hallways. And the station's motorized cart docking and touch screen controller make operation easy.

Once the system was decided upon, the next hurdle to overcome was delivery. Since Aladdin is focused solely on providing meal delivery systems to healthcare operations, its manufacturing facilities were operating consistently through the pandemic to assist healthcare facilities in their essential task of feeding patients. Hils immediately contacted Aladdin's manufacturing team and they found a Convect-Rite Select unit available for shipment. "We literally shipped it on a Monday and it arrived in Shreveport on Tuesday," Hils says. The quick delivery ensured the SMMC team had sufficient time to determine the best configuration of the utilities for the unit.

The kitchen at the Ochsner LSU Health Shreveport – Academic Medical Center facility prepares food to be delivered to its St. Mary Medical Center.



The prepared food is then loaded into the Aladdin Convect-Rite Cart.

"Essential provider" letter in hand, Hils and Aladdin Project Manager Jeff Withers made the trip to Shreveport a few days later to complete the installation and once again had to deal with the realities of the pandemic. "There were temperature tests to get across the [state] borders and through the door," he says.

Normally, Hils says, an installation like this is a fairly casual affair. "You'll usually find me in a suit and tie; I hang up the suit coat and begin," he says. But for this installation, Hils and Withers were garbed in full protective attire: hazmat suits, goggles and masks. "All the PPE was provided to us so we were safe going in," he says, noting the team practiced social distancing as well during the install.

Another factor that worked in SMMC's favor was the unexpected availability of state health inspectors to give on-site project approval. The inspectors can normally be booked up months in advance but, with the pandemic, that wasn't the case. The inspectors gave their approval, and the system was ready to go in time for the first patients to arrive at the end of April.

Unlike many foodservice operations, which use Convect-Rite Carts to hold food on trays, SMMC uses them to hold bulk food. Foodservice workers put bulk hot and cold food into the cart, where it is held at the proper temperatures for an hour before it gets transported to SMMC. Food temperatures are safely maintained during transport because the cart is fully insulated, divided into hot and cold sections. Once at SMMC, workers assemble trays for transport to patients, using disposables because there is currently no dishmachine at SMMC.

The Convect-Rite system makes meal service easier for the staff at SMMC and helps contain costs as well. Since the system keeps food at the proper temperature, the medical center does not need a full kitchen. Plus, the system requires only a few staff members to assemble the trays for the patient meals. Stephanie Fedd, Food & Nutrition Services Manager at the hospital, oversees the transportation of food between the two facilities. Her biggest challenge working at a facility where the food is prepared off-site, she says, "is last-minute changes and ensuring safety of the food in transit. The Aladdin system helps to ensure the food is transported within safe holding temperatures for our patients. It is easy to use and perfect for off-site deliveries."

"We are proud to be able to aid partners like Ochsner LSU Health in the treatment of those who are in need," says Nate Jackson, President of Aladdin Temp-Rite. "We remain committed to supporting the noble purpose of caring for those who are currently in a compromised state of health."

Thanks to a team effort all the way around, SMMC got its food transportation system set up in a relatively short amount of time under the most stressful conditions imaginable. Kotheimer of ABM Healthcare says that the Aladdin "sales rep and install team provided us with excellent support." Lyons says he got a call from the medical center, saying, "Honestly, I don't know how you guys did it. I don't know how you put this all together." He adds that "our client was extremely happy. Even with such a short time frame, it was perfect from day one."

BRAND WATCH



Years of focused experience as healthcare meal delivery solution provider:

50+

The first pellet-based induction system, Heat on Demand®, introduced:

1995

Developed Convect-Rite® III convection system with patented air-flow technology:

2003

Size of Aladdin's U.S. manufacturing facility in square feet:

350,000

aladdintemprite.com

Piping hot meals for patients are plated and served at St. Mary Medical Center.

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Stephanie Fedd,
Food & Nutrition Services Manager

