



# INNOVATIVE FOOD AND DINING TRENDS IN SENIOR LIVING



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# INNOVATIVE FOOD AND DINING TRENDS IN SENIOR LIVING

Dining drives senior living business—there's no question about it.

Senior living companies have much to gain from their dining programs, financially and otherwise. Food can lead to increased occupancy and brand recognition, and it directly impacts a provider's bottom line.

Run-of-the-mill dining won't do the trick, though. Operators need to think outside of the realm of their traditional dining setups and look to other industries for hot food trends and innovative hospitality approaches that can translate to the senior living space.

"Food needs to be at the forefront of all initiatives in senior living, because it's something people care about every day," says Tonya Hendricks, a district manager with Unidine, a food and dining management services company with 230 senior living clients. "It's critical to keep reinventing ourselves—stay fresh and remain aligned with trends. As food trends change, we either need to be ahead of them or change with them."

From catering offerings and farm-to-table programs to food trucks and home-brewed beers, senior living food and dining is poised for a revolution—one that will propel companies ahead of their competition, spurring revenue and marketing initiatives.

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- **Tonya Hendricks**

*District Manager at Unidine*



# FOOD AS A SENIOR LIVING BRAND EXTENSION

Given the caliber of talent among senior living dining staff these days, utterly distinct recipes and “scratch” cooking have become a norm. Now, some operators are taking their special dishes and products one step further with private branding and creating signature dishes that reflect their mission and values.

One such provider is Brookdale Senior Living, which operates more than 1,120 senior living communities across 47 states as the largest senior living operator in the nation. The Brentwood, Tennessee-based company wanted to enhance flavors and the overall dining experience for residents in all of its communities, adhering to seniors’ particular tastes.

“As the senior palate changes, it has a diminished number of taste buds that aren’t able to enjoy foods the same way,” says Joska J.W. Hajdu, Brookdale’s senior vice president of dining services. “What stimulates a senior in the dining experience is very different from how [younger counterparts] would judge food.”

As such, Brookdale launched a privately branded program with a line of seasoning blends 15 years ago, dubbed Brookdale Seasoning Blends. There were originally six distinct concoctions, but there are now seven—three of which are very low in sodium, with the remainder sodium-free.

In creating its blends, Brookdale opted to use ingredients seniors can still taste, which are pulverized and freeze-dried. To avoid the ever-frustrating circumstance of seasonings getting stuck in teeth or dentures if they’re too flaky or dry, Brookdale’s line completely dissolves in the natural juices of the food at hand, adding flavor to amplify the dining experience back to a level where seniors can enjoy it.

Examples of seasonings include a beef and barbecue blend, as well as a fish and seafood blend. All are encased in individual packets for residents to use tableside.

In addition to the seasoning blends, Brookdale has its own line of Brookdale Signature Sauces, which consists of eight different sauces with unique Brookdale recipes. The selection features a lemon butter sauce and a pineapple chipotle barbecue sauce, among others.

“With seniors, amplifying the ability to make choices during the dining experience is very important,” Hajdu says. “These create endless options of menu choices.”

Other items Brookdale creates itself are its Brookdale Optimum Life Granola, a cereal and granola blend with a super-food

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*Senior Vice President of Dining Services  
at Brookdale Senior Living*

