

YMCA CAMP FOSTER

Lake Okoboji, Iowa



YMCA Camp Foster embarked on a transformational project to replace its outdated 1920s-era kitchen, which had long served as the backbone of their dining services. The kitchen, reliant on donated and second-hand equipment, not only struggled to meet current food and mechanical codes but also fell short of supporting the camp's vision for growth and modernization. At Camp Foster, the dining facility holds a central role as the place where campers gather to share meals and create lifelong memories. Addressing this crucial space became a priority to align with the camp's future goals and ensure reliable, efficient service for years to come.

The new kitchen was designed with functionality and simplicity at its core, offering a low-tech approach tailored for easy operation by summer counselors. Key design features included streamlined storage, production, and warewashing spaces, along with flexibility to accommodate the camp's family-style meal service. The team added a tilting braising pan to simplify meal preparation for large groups, improving efficiency for staples like chili, pasta, and mac and cheese. Custom solutions, such as mobile speed racks for bussing and resetting tables, significantly reduced labor demands while maintaining smooth meal transitions.

Details

Opening Date: June 2023
Equipment Cost: \$650,000

2,500 sq ft of kitchen & serving area

Scope

Kitchen replacement and modernization of facilities

The renovation also prioritized the needs of campers with food allergies by introducing an NSF mobile folding table. Compact and versatile, this solution allowed for allergen-friendly meal prep within the limited kitchen space, ensuring safety without disrupting workflow. Ventilation improvements were a focus in the upgraded facility, with properly sized exhaust hoods to maintain comfort and accommodate potential future equipment changes. Enhancements to the dish room included a full-length exhaust hood, reducing heat and humidity while supporting sustainable warewashing operations.

This project was unique in its emphasis on practical design rather than high-tech solutions. By aligning kitchen functionality with the camp’s menu and style of service, Rippe Associates delivered a space that balances tradition with modern efficiency. The improvements not only meet immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for the camp's continued growth, ensuring that YMCA Camp Foster remains a welcoming and competitive destination for campers.

