

NOW YOU'RE COOKING: KITCHEN IMPROVEMENTS CUT WAIT TIMES

The strategy behind cutting the lines in front of concession stands extends to the cooking technology behind the counter.

At Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, a challenging building for food providers because of its age and design, Spectra Food Services & Hospitality has installed ventless fryers this season at multiple stands offering fried chicken and other fried items.

The fryers contain a chamber with filters that work with electricity to eliminate the heat, grease and smoke escaping from traditional fryers, said Jay Satenspiel, a company vice president. The old-school fryers don't work well in a 50-year-old stadium made largely of concrete where the byproducts of fried foods have no place to go, Satenspiel said.

Going ventless allowed Spectra to expand the number of french fry stands at the coliseum to five locations over the previous two stands in the limited areas with proper ventilation. It has allowed the vendor to expand its menu for Oakland A's games to include a chicken and waffle sandwich and loaded tater tots, which have been a big hit, Satenspiel said. Bottom line: Developing more fry stands using the ventless units has helped reduce lines by giving Spectra the flexibility to reach a greater number of fans who no longer have to walk halfway around the stadium to find those items.

"If I had to crack open a cement wall and build a whole new duct system, you're looking at an exorbitant amount of money, and there are certain structures like the Coliseum where it's not possible," Satenspiel said. "But we wanted to add frying capacity, and it's helped us expand our variety and provide a new offering to the fans."

Elsewhere, Spectra has the ventless fryers at 70-year-old Jones AT&T Stadium, the home of Texas Tech's football team in Lubbock, Satenspiel said.

There is a greater cost to going ventless. Those fryers run \$15,000 to \$20,000 a unit compared with \$5,000 to \$6,000 for the traditional system. For Spectra, the additional investment is worth it due to the cooking flexibility, he said.

In another example of using cooking methods to cut wait times back in Oakland, the new brick pizza oven at the rebranded Shibe Park Tavern, the stadium's old west side club, cooks hand-tossed pizzas in five minutes from the time fans place their orders. The spot has become one of the busiest food destinations in the building.

Spectra controls the process through a buzzer system similar to restaurants. If it's crowded, Spectra gives patrons a buzzer while they're waiting for their pizza, and they can have a beer and watch baseball on TV. The seven-inch pizzas sell for \$10 to \$11, Satenspiel said.