



DONOVAN ASHLEY/News Staff

Chef Don Miller puts the finishing touches on a Baylor Medical Center at Garland hospital meal as Joy Westerhouse, director of food nutrition (left) and staff chef Claudia Paxton observe his culinary prowess at work. Below, Miller arranges garnishes at the hospital's updated salad bar.

Hospital food or haute cuisine?

Baylor hospital hires chef to teach employees culinary expertise

By **DEBBIE HOWELL**

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The difference between good and bad hospital food, according to Chef Don Miller, can be as simple as whether a chicken breast is delicately sauteed or baked to a consistency that bounces better than it digests.

"If you overcook a chicken breast, which is done all over the country, then I call it 'hockey puck chicken,'" Miller said.

The nationally-known chef, who makes it his profession to transform mediocre institutional food into cuisine that would rival the Mansion at Turtle Creek, recently worked his magic at Baylor Medical Center at Garland.

And perhaps to his surprise, "Chef Don" didn't find any overcooked, dry turkey or bland gravy on the Swiss steak when he sampled Baylor's menu.

"In all honesty, regardless of what you hear about hospital food, the food here before I am doing anything is already in the top 20 percent in the nation," Miller said, giving the hospital's food a rating of 8 on a scale of 1-10.

But even though Joy Westerhouse, Baylor's director of food nutrition, had attended some of Chef Don's "Destination

10" food quality improvement seminars, she and other staff members talked hospital administrators into having Miller come out for his 3-day "Rent-A-Chef" program last week to rate the food and teach the hospital's 40-member food service staff his secrets to serving mouth-watering meals.



"Our goal is to improve the quality, the look, the flavor and give us more pizzazz," Westerhouse explained.

And Chef Don began putting his artistic talents to work in the cafeteria immediately.

"We're implementing a muffin and pastry bar that has a showbiz flair to it," Miller said. "People that come to the cafeteria will be real excited because it looks like Las Vegas."

Miller, who stressed that "people eat with their eyes as well as their tastebuds," puts a high priority on making meals look attractive as well as taste good. Such small touches as decorative radish garnishes at the salad bar can make all the difference, he said.

"Customers of a hospital don't know a lot about heart surgery, but they know food and house-keeping. They know those two things, so it behooves a hospital or retirement home to project excellence in those areas," Miller said.

Of course everybody knows