



Studying and eating – they simply belong together. In this episode, we would like to give you an exclusive look behind the scenes of our refectories. In this interview, Klaus Finkenzeller talks about his daily tasks as a refectory manager. You'll find out what it's like in a large kitchen, how the menu is created and which dishes go down best with our guests.

Mang: Hello and welcome to a new edition of our my-stuwe podcast. Today we take a look at the gastronomic offerings of the Studierendenwerk. Studying and canteens – they belong together. According to a study by our umbrella organisation, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of all students are regulars in the refectory. On average, they eat there 3 times a week. But not many of them know what goes on behind the scenes of such a large kitchen. We want to change that today. We'll show you what has to happen so that a warm plate lands on your tray at lunchtime. Klaus Finkenzeller is someone who knows all about it. He has been with the Studierendenwerk for many years and is now responsible for the refectory Morgenstelle in Tübingen.

Hello Mr Finkenzeller. As a refectory manager, you are really busy. We are all the more grateful that you have taken the time to give us a little insight into your everyday work. I would like to start with you as a person and the demands placed on a refectory manager. What was that like for you? How did you end up at the Studierendenwerk?

Finkenzeller: First of all, hello everyone. How did I end up at the Studierendenwerk? I did a classical apprenticeship as a professional chef and after my apprenticeship I did my apprenticeship years at home and abroad. After that, I was in the German Armed Forces. After that I did further training, got married in between and did further training again. Then I took on my first management positions, was self-employed and have been at the Studierendenwerk since 2006. I started there as a so-called first cook and have gradually worked my way up until today. All the way to refectory manager.

Mang: That's really a long story that connects you in the Studierendenwerk. Almost 40 people work in the

refectory Morgenstelle, and you sell up to 2000 meals on average. That's quite a lot, and it certainly requires special talents to really be able to manage it all. What skills would you say are indispensable for a good refectory manager?

Finkenzeller: Indispensable? The staff member with whom you work practically every day. Without them, a refectory manager is nothing. We can only do what the refectory managers envision with good staff. As a refectory manager, you should of course be flexible, be creative and also orientate yourself a little on the market. What is modern at the moment or what do our customers want?

Mang: That definitely sounds like quite a challenge. Let's talk a bit more about your everyday life. How can we imagine a typical working day for you? Does it exist at all? Does it sometimes happen that you stand at the cooker yourself and still cook for the students?

Finkenzeller: Cooking? I admit. Very rarely. Which is a pity, because I love to cook. To the first question: My normal day begins at 5:30 a.m. with unlocking the door, followed by my rounds through and around the house; then I prepare the day's recipes for the staff. That they then know what has to be done when, where and how. I also do the staff scheduling. Yes, and then I'm also allowed to supply outposts like Rottenburg or Prinz Karl. The recipes have to be prepared accordingly. The forms have to be prepared. I also have to prepare the daily serving sheets or the menu sheets. These are all my tasks. A short briefing with the staff, then I'm back in the office. Then I finish the day's work from the previous day and start preparing for the next day, including the day's orders. In between, of course, I treat myself to a coffee. Very important. And then I supervise the pro-

duction. I also taste everything that comes out of the canteen. I try everything we produce ourselves, from salads to soups, everything. Only in small quantities, of course, otherwise you could soon ball me. And at 11:30 the rush hour starts in the canteen. That's when I retreat to the office. And then I look for menus. Or what new products are on the market. But then I also have to make arrangements for events or place orders for other events. So my time is very, very tightly measured in terms of things, but it also varies every day. There are days when there's a lot going on, you don't know where you're going to reach first, and then there's the second day when I say, totally chill today, I can choose products today that I might want to taste. I then talk to our central purchasing department about it, so that they request it.

Mang: Well, I'll summarise it like this: You are one of the first to be here in the morning and one of the last to leave in the afternoon.

Finkenzeller: Yes, you can sum it up like that.

Mang: The menu, which is, so to speak, the basic structure of the student lunch, is also determined by you as refectory manager. Perhaps you could describe it to us: How does it come about? Do you Google recipes or I don't know – how does it work?

Finkenzeller: Well, we have a huge number of recipes stored in our system. Of course, they are also very old and tried and tested. Perhaps we would have to renew one or two of them. However, every refectory manager can do that, he has the right to do so. Every refectory manager of a large refectory is responsible for the menu for eight weeks of the year. These are always the semester periods. In the small semesters, each cafeteria can process the leftovers from the large semesters in some way. Then, of course, we try to cater to the regional, seasonal and, of course, the preferences. What is hip at the moment, what is modern? That's what we try to implement.

Mang: It is always noticeable to students that the daily specials in our refectory Morgenstelle, Shedhalle and Prinz Karl are somewhat different. What is the reason for that?

Finkenzeller: To a large extent also due to the preferences of our guests. I would like to give an example. Up here at the Morgenstelle, rice is an unpopular side dish. The students would like noodles, spaetzle. I could make

noodles every day. It would just have to be different ones every day. A popular side dish. And if we know that rice is on the menu, then we can say for ourselves: we don't need it, because it stays. Let's have noodles or „spaetzle“, that's what we like to eat. With my colleagues down in the valley, however, it is also a problem at the moment because of the structural conditions. The Shedhalle cannot produce as much as the Mensa Wilhelmstraße used to. Therefore, they have to work with a different offer at the moment.

Mang: Good, so there are very practical reasons why, for example, the Shedhallen offer differs so much. Where can I actually find the current menu of the individual refectories and how far in advance can I look at the menus?

Finkenzeller: We have a requirement. The menu plan has to be in our system two weeks before it comes into effect so that we can also make the purchases. This menu plan can be seen either on the homepage or on the app. Then of course there's new media like Instagram and whatnot. Sorry, I'm a dinosaur on that. I have no idea about that. Yes, definitely they can see everything, even if it's about allergens. In this case, allergens are already stored, but for everyone who hears this, please always pay attention to the daily updated allergens on the issues, because we don't always get the goods that we actually ordered and we always have to change something at short notice.

Mang: So a good tip again. Have another look at the current allergen labelling on site. Let's talk about a trend. Trends are important, especially when it comes to food, and in recent years there has been a move towards more vegetarian and vegan dishes. How are you positioned here as a refectory? What choice do I have here?

Finkenzeller: For Tübingen I can say: we have a vegan dish every day, we have a vegetarian dish and we have a meat or fish dish. In addition, we have – I can only speak of the refectory Morgenstelle – a salad buffet with a large proportion of hot dishes. Our salad buffet has a large selection, where everyone can either take something from each salad because they want to try it or because they want to try something specific: vegan, vegetarian, meat or fish.

Mang: So there is definitely also an offer and a varied offer for vegans and vegetarian students. A topic that you have just mentioned. It is very important for stu-

dents to know which foods are processed. In addition, food intolerances are on the rise. Here, transparency is also demanded again and again from the student union. Perhaps you could describe again in concrete terms where the ingredients are to be found and where I can find out about them?

Finkenzeller: Well, as I said, we have the basic framework on the homepage, but the daily updated information is either in the food guidance system or on the displays for the dishes that are not integrated in the guidance system. The allergens in the food are listed there in detail – also for the soup.

Mang: So pay close attention to the screens or the displays at the counters. Students have little money, at least as a rule. And I imagine it's difficult to offer high-quality food at a reasonable price. How does the pricing of the dishes work? Is there also something for the smaller purse?

Finkenzeller: Yes, definitely. With the so-called offer of the day. It is practically a so-called plate dish in which, in order to be somewhat sustainable, we also use the leftovers that we have. They are not freshly cooked that day, but the leftovers from the day before. This is then sold at a lower price the next day.

Mang: Well, price is certainly an important argument for students when choosing. But taste and quality definitely also play an important role. What about the freshness of the ingredients? Is that also important to you personally? And how high is the level of convenience?

Finkenzeller: Well, I'm starting from the morning job again. I have a convenience level of about 80 %. But that also includes the ready-made pasta, not just the ready-made breaded schnitzel. With ready-made meals we are at 50 %. But if you include, as I said, pasta, gnocchi or potato dumplings, that's up to 80 %. Salads and all products that are used for mensaVital are fresh products. Therefore, the price of this meal is sometimes a little higher than a normal daily meal. Of course, this is due to the basic products.

Mang: MensaVital, to reiterate, is the somewhat higher-quality menu line and therefore also somewhat more expensive. Let's talk about another topic that is on everyone's lips right now – sustainability. How sustainably do you actually work here in the canteen? How do you deal with leftovers? Is it thrown away? That is certainly also a topic that concerns many students.

Finkenzeller: Well, I can tell you that I really throw away very little. I am clearly against throwing food away. The leftovers, as I just said, are mostly reprocessed, for example as the basis for another dish. As an example, I can tell you that if we have ratatouille vegetables, that would be a wonderful basis to make tomato soup for the next day. That way, I don't have to throw anything away. That makes me very, very sustainable. And I can also give away a lot about the offer of the day. Whether in the cafeteria or in the dining hall, there are no more to-go dishes. We've done away with that completely. If someone wants to take their food with them, they have to bring us something.

Mang: Now the gastronomic location on the Morgenstelle in Tübingen is a very special one. But many of our refectories are located in the immediate vicinity of city centres. And then there are of course numerous competing offers, for example butchers, snack chains, bakers. From your point of view, why should students decide to go to the refectory now? So maybe you'll use the situation now for another appeal: Why is it worth going to the canteen?

Finkenzeller: I'm not a fan of advertising, I think everyone should decide for themselves what they like. So I think the most important thing, no matter which refectory, which refectory manager: we have to respond to the wishes, preferences for food and drinks of our customers. But we also have to respond to praise and criticism. That's the only way we can develop. For me, that is the basic prerequisite. And then: We are networked and present with our menu on so many platforms that everyone can actually get an idea. What is there? Do I like it? Does it turn me on? Do I want that today? So I don't know if there's anything more you can do. Unfortunately, at the moment all the refectory buildings are totally restricted somewhere, so we can't offer what we'd like to offer, because we simply don't have the space. But thank God we have land in sight. Hopefully, when Wilhelmstraße opens soon, that will change again.

Mang: Okay, you heard it. Come by, try the food in the canteen. Mr Finkenzeller, I think we could tell you a lot more about the Studierendenwerk refectories today, but that should be it at this point. We would really like to thank you very much for taking the time today, for letting us look behind the scenes. And if you have any other questions for our refectory managers, please feel free to write to us on social media or by email. I would like to thank Mr Finkenzeller very much for his detailed

insights and I hope to see you again very soon. Take care, Ciao.

Finkenzeller: And goodbye.

**Note: This transcription of the podcast was generated with the help of machine software. We apologise for any minor discrepancies or spelling mistakes.*