

Cooking for a large family

By Dave Chmara

Much has been said about hospital food and most of the comments associated with it are not positive to say the least.

But, because McCausland is smaller than hospitals in larger centres, "cooking here is like cooking for a large family," said Melanie McKenna, director of dietary services at McCausland.

McKenna, who has been with McCausland for 2 1/2 years, also said, "we often have patients who ask for recipes."

McKenna's responsibilities include acting as a therapeutic diet counsellor, overseeing the food service operation for the

hospital (i.e. menu planning, ordering food, looking after the kitchen operation), and coordinating the Meals on Wheels program.

Currently, nine people are taking advantage of the Meals on Wheels program although McKenna said the number can be anywhere from two to 12.

"Some people only use the program during the winter while others have used it ever since it started a few years ago," she said.

Some seniors find either find shopping, or the meal preparation difficult.

"They don't feel it's worth going through the meal prepara-

tion for one person," said McKenna.

Because of this, doctors, and sometimes family members will refer the person to the Meals on Wheels program.

At times, family members may pay for one month of meals as a birthday present and the person will remain on the program because they are so pleased with the meals, said McKenna.

The hospital uses two students who take turns delivering the meals.

"They don't just drop off the meal and leave - they talk with the people as well. They provide social interaction so many of these people need," McKenna said.

The dietary department of the hospital employs four full-time and four part-time people. One cook has received formal training while others have experience cooking at home and have worked their way up to cooks at the hospital.

McKenna said in preparing meals, things such as cholesterol and salt content are closely watched - especially for those

people on restricted diets.

As for the current debate regarding the value in watching cholesterol intake, McKenna said the publicity is making the public more aware of their health and people are now more nutrition conscience.

She believes reducing ones cholesterol intake has definite advantages including lowering the risk of heart disease.

Because of the small size of the hospital, McKenna said it allows for greater flexibility in the menu preparation.

"We get very few complaints about the food and all the credit goes to the kitchen staff," she said.

The department keeps track of birthdays for chronic care patients and on these occasions bakes a cake. Other special occasions, such as Christmas or Thanksgiving, the kitchen prepares turkey dinners for the patients.

Instead of ordering from large warehouses, the dietary depart-

ment purchases all its food locally at Costa's and Figliomeni's grocery stores.

"If we ordered from Thunder Bay we would still be going to the local stores," said McKenna. "They give us excellent service."

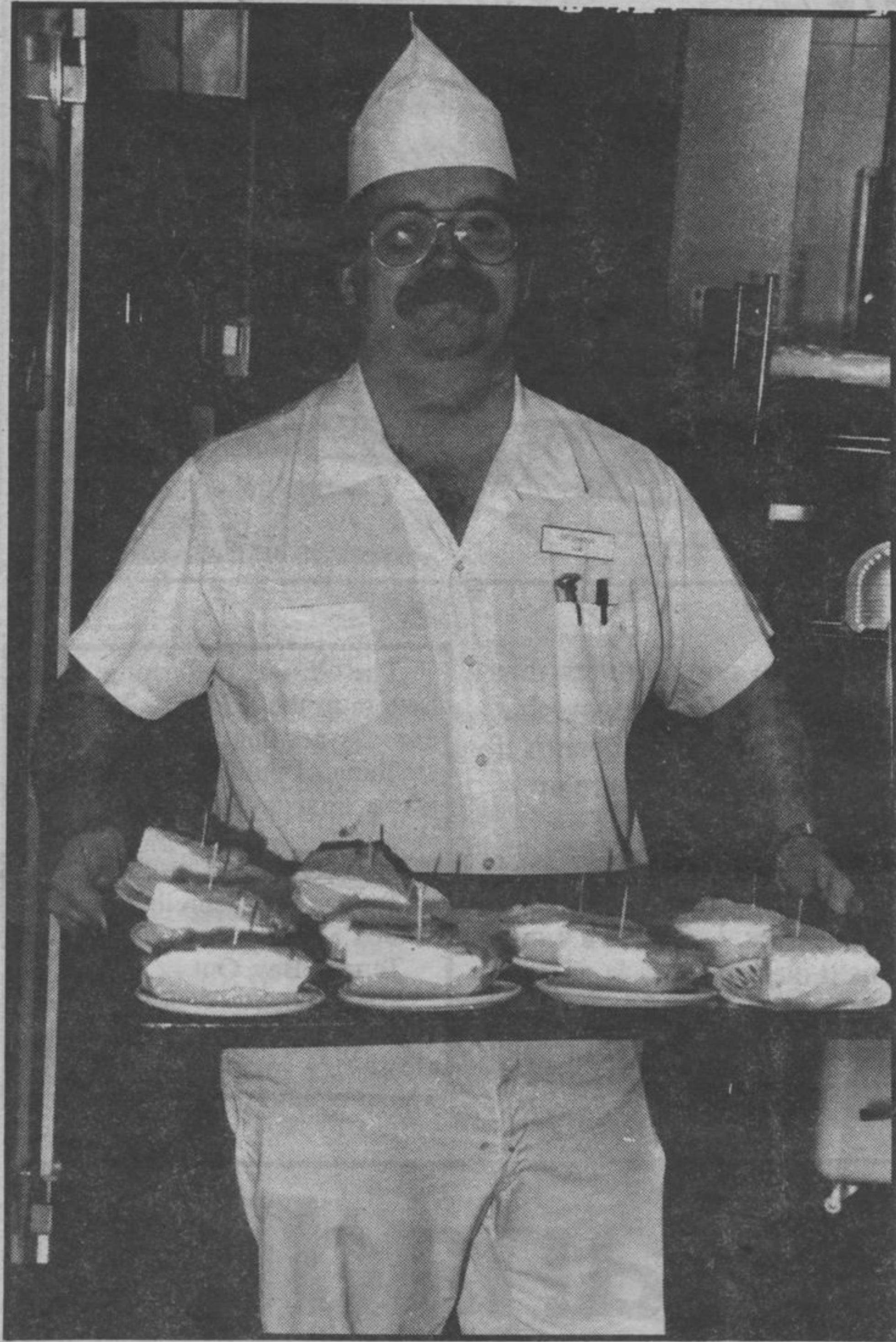
One advantage of shopping locally occurs when a patient is put on a special diet. After leaving the hospital, the person knows the food served there can be purchased in town.

McKenna said if the kitchen runs out of anything, all it takes is a short trip up the street to make the purchase.

Surprisingly, the kitchen is not the hot, steamy place one might think it would be.

Bill Slykhuis, one of the full-time cooks, said, "it's the only kitchen I've ever worked in that is air conditioned - but we don't complain too loudly."

Despite all the hot meal preparation that takes place there, the kitchen is one of the coolest places in the hospital.



Bill Slykhuis holds up a tempting tray full of lemon meringue pie. McCausland's kitchen staff prepares meals so good that patients often ask for the recipes.

Photo by Dave Chmara

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