

The Smelliest Place on Campus

IF you've wandered through the Park School parking lot the last few weeks, or passed the pond by the access road on a windy day, you may have wondered to yourself, "What in the holy hell is that smell?"

Zachary Dinerstein

As a journalist, I felt the need find an answer.

I found the smell emanating from two rotting towers of garbage covered in flies, slowly turning itself into compost.

When looking at a pile of garbage that massive, the biggest question that comes to mind is, "Where did it all come from?" I went to a campus dining hall to find out.

"Of 1,000 portions made for roughly 1,000 students a night, the Campus Center usually trashes less than twenty," says Jeff Scott, the general manager of the Campus Center Dining Hall. "We prepare food for our forecast ... and usually, we're pretty dead on."

Adam Trabka, an IC alumus, worked at the Campus Center dining hall for four years. As a student manager, he saw a lot of food come through the dining hall.

"I wouldn't say the Campus Center is wasteful," he says. "On an average night, we might throw out three pounds of food. For the most part, I'd say we hit the mark pretty well."

Where the problem lies is with the students. According to Julie Roberts, a student chef at the Terraces Dining Hall, the cooks can only do so much. Then it's up to the students to make an effort to conserve.

"I do it, too," says Roberts, on over-piling her plate in the dining halls. "But you need to make that conscious decision to say 'no.'"

The most waste she sees comes from the food that students take, but don't get

around to eating.

"That's a ton of food," Roberts says. "That's the waste."

So maybe the answer to this problem lies not in cutting back on what the dining halls prepare, but in curbing students' eating habits.

"People usually leave just a little bit of food on their plate," she says. "But that little bit adds up. You've just got to be conscious about it."

Jacob Engle's hands are the ones you see through the dish-room cubbyhole most nights, grabbing half-empty trays and soiled

This gives a whole new meaning to the word "recycling."

silverware. In the dish room of the Campus Center, he clears off food from students' plates, draining glasses of grape juice into a large, 32-gallon plastic bucket.

The bucket he dumps the food into is rectangular and red. Its rim rises halfway up his thigh. It's propped on wheels because, once filled, it'll be too heavy to lift.

At 5:30, the dining hall has been serving dinner for one hour, and the bucket is already half-full with partially eaten cheeseburgers, torn slices of pizza and splashes of discarded soup.

"Come back and see it at the end of the night," he says.

At 7:00 the bucket is completely full. Beyond the kitchen at the "loading dock," sits another container identical to this one. Other containers in the room con-

tain scraps from the prep kitchen or old food left over from the day's line that aren't more than halfway full. The two that hold the leftovers from the students' dinners are filled right to the top.

And this is a Sunday. According to Engle, on a weekday the amount of wasted food would be double.

Back in the front of the cafeteria, I stand, notebook in hand, against the wall and watch as students bring their unused food to the dish room. An uneaten slab of ham, a plate of sweet potato fries, half of a mixed salad, a gouged piece of vanilla cake, a completely untouched ham sandwich, half of an egg salad sandwich, and a pizza slice with one bite taken from it are among the things that make their way into Engle's hands.

"Anything returned to the dish room," says Scott, "goes to compost."

It's a beautiful, sunny Saturday, and I'm driving down the access road towards Rogan's Corner. The rows of trees have just started to bud for the upcoming spring months, and the wind is making little waves in the pond on the side of the road. I'm following the smell of rotting garbage.

Just past the Parking and Traffic Station is a sign with an arrow pointing left and below it are printed the words "Compost Facility."

The shed looms huge and green in the middle of a grove of trees. Attached to the right of the shed is an office used by the compost workers on their lunch breaks. Inside, it looks like any other office, until you turn toward the wall covered by a row of stained windows, which frame a shed the size of an airplane hanger. In the hanger is a mammoth pile of rotting garbage, roughly 100 meters long.

Though the windows are thick, the