

Lewis dining hall named after former director

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By Brian James

Kansan staff writer

Lenoir Ekdahl leaned back in her chair and laughed during a reception in her honor.

"This is overwhelming," she said. "Imagine having a building named after you — it's almost embarrassing."

The new dining hall at Lewis Hall was officially dedicated and recognized as the Lenoir D. Ekdahl Dining Commons in a ceremony Saturday morning. About 150 people attended the event held at the dining hall.

The event honored Ekdahl, who retired in 1989 after serving as director of food services in KU residence halls for 35 years. Ekdahl is a graduate of Kansas State University and a member of the KU Women's Hall of Fame.

Chancellor Gene Budig, Ed Meyen, executive vice chancellor, David Ambler, vice chancellor for student affairs, and Ken Stoner, director of student housing, each spoke briefly during the ceremony.

Ekdahl said after the ceremony that student workers in the dining halls made her career enjoyable.

"They were always so great to work with," she said. "They brought such a different insight into the job."

Ekdahl arrived at the University in 1955 from Purdue University, where she supervised two kitchens and four dining halls. She planned

to stay at the University for only three years.

"My husband worked in Topeka and told me he would only commute there for that long," she said. "Well, he ended up commuting for 25 years.

"I guess I was just enjoying myself."

She said she estimated that during her career at the University, she oversaw nearly 200 different dining hall supervisors.

In a speech during the ceremony, Stoner told a story he had heard about Ekdahl's first day on the job.

Ekdahl told cooks to double the amount of rice for dinner that night, Stoner said. The cooks questioned the decision.

"To that she replied, 'On my first day of work here at KU we will not run out of food, and the students will not leave here hungry — not on my shift,'" Stoner said.

"I'm told that on the days that followed they also introduced a number of new rice recipes," he said.

Ekdahl said she learned from that incident to not second-guess her cooks.

Louisa Davis, who worked in the dining halls for 38 years and was one of Ekdahl's cooks, spoke with Ekdahl after the ceremony.

"I'm glad you didn't blame us," Davis said, grinning. "We just did what you told us."

Ekdahl said she was pleased with the nickname given to the dining

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Lenoir Ekdahl

Former KU food services director

hall.

"I'm awfully happy they are just calling it Mrs. E's," she said. "Students can do some interesting things with names of halls, but I don't think they will with this."

Stoner said that naming the dining hall after Ekdahl seemed obvious.

"I suggested it to David Ambler, but everyone thought it was the logical name to use anyway," he said.

The new dining hall's food court was part of a new trend in dining services, Ekdahl said.

"I think this place is great," she said. "They've gotten away from the stereotype of the typical college dining hall experience."