

Gourmet dining room keeps meal costs down

You won't catch employees of the Washington, DC-based American Enterprise Institute (AEI) brown-bagging it for lunch. Instead, they can enjoy three-course gourmet meals served in a top-floor dining room for just \$4.

AEI is a public-policy research organization with 140 employees, plus 40 interns each semester. Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John R. Bolton and Lynn Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, are among the organization's 70 scholars and fellows.

Because of the number of events and visitors the company hosts, it was less expensive to offer in-house gourmet dining than to reimburse employees for frequent restaurant bills or caterers.

"To be able to cater in-house was a substantial savings to the organization instead of having to bring in," says HR Director Michael Druen.

The dining room's primary purpose is to host guests, but all employees and interns may eat there. In fact, at least 70% of employees use the dining room daily. Some eat in, while others carry their meals out with them.

The decades-old, full-service dining room loses money on its \$4 meals, but not as much as it would spend on reimbursable restaurant lunches, Druen says.

AEI's reputation, jokes Druen, is based equally on its scholarly work and its dining room.

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