



LOCAL

A French company now prepares meals for Delta flights from RDU

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DURHAM — A French company that provides meals for people on airplanes, trains, offshore oil platforms and other places around the world has opened its first kitchen in the United States, in an out-of-the-way warehouse between Research Triangle Park and Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

Newrest began providing food service for Delta Air Lines flights out of RDU this month. Delta is RDU's busiest airline, with nearly 80 departures a day that carry nearly a third of all passengers that fly out of the airport.

All the food on those flights now comes from Newrest — from the soda and snacks in coach and the turkey-and-cheese sandwiches eaten by the crew to the beef tenderloin served in class. Newrest cooks and assembles meals for a handful of longer flights to places such as a

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Angeles, Seattle, Cancun and Paris. But if you are expecting French cuisine, know that Delta dictates the menu.

Newrest began preparing food trolleys for Delta planes on July 11. Executives for the two companies, including Newrest co-CEO Jonathan Stent-Torriani, came to Durham for a dedication ceremony and tour of the facility on Thursday.

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It was Delta that decided RDU would be the first airport Newrest would serve in the U.S. Delta was attracted by the company's experience, efficiency and ability to meet the airline's specifications, said Lisa Bauer, vice president for onboard services, and RDU was a good place to start because it's a growing market but not too big.

The feedback so far has been good, Bauer said.

"We get flight attendant comments every single day that we really look at," she said. "And the ones we've been getting already from the initial service in Raleigh have just been great."

Because it packs food trollies that are loaded onto airplanes, security at the Newrest facility is strict; employees and visitors must pass through a metal detector on the way in. The first of those trollies go out about 3:30 a.m. for morning flights, and they continue in waves until about 7:30 p.m., said Olivier Laurac, the company's vice president for the Americas based outside Toronto.

Laurac helped set up the Triangle facility and says he and other managers did the production jobs themselves to see what worked well and what didn't.

"We are on a learning curve," he said.

Laurac said doing business in the Triangle has been relatively easy, with cooperation from RDU, local governments and contractors.

“There was always a solution, and that is helpful when starting a new operation in a country,” he said.

Newrest now has operations in 49 countries and 33,000 employees. For Delta at RDU, it replaces another large international company, LSG Sky Chefs, which is based in Germany.

Newrest plans to open a second kitchen to serve Delta flights at Salt Lake City in September. From there, executives for the two companies say they will see how it’s going before possibly expanding to other airports.

“The plans are to open those two first,” said Frédéric Hillion, the U.S. manager for Newrest. “If we are successful, it might be the beginning of a nice partnership.”

Newrest is preparing 1,000 to 1,200 meals a day in Durham, Laurac said, and the company has the capacity to make 5,000 here. About 80 people work at the facility, but for Thursday’s ceremony an outside company was brought in to cater, using Newrest’s kitchen.

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