

# Beef Takes Center Plate In the Nation's Capitol City

BY MERRIDEE WELLS



The very Texan Black Tie and Boots Ball, hosted by the Texas State Society, was undeniably one of the hottest tickets in Washington, D.C., this January. The ball, which is conducted prior to each inauguration, received much more publicity this year as Texans and their guests celebrated the presidential success of their former governor and native son George W. Bush.

What started as an exclusive, by-invitation-only, sit-down dinner for 250 rapidly escalated into an all-out party once Bush was declared the winner. The final count figured more than 900 attendees, all decked out in their finest tuxedos and evening gowns. The look wouldn't be complete without a Texan's favorite footwear: cowboy boots.

In attendance were the highest-ranking political figures in Texas, including the Bushes; celebrities such as Dallas Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman; and entertainers such as Lyle Lovett, Clint Black, Tanya Tucker and the group Asleep At The Wheel, to name a few.

One of the Angus fraternity's own was present. Mary Lou Bradley, Childress, Texas, attended by special invitation, as it was the Bradleys' B3R Beef that was the featured menu item.

"Several months back we were contacted by the Texas State Society about providing the beef," Bradley explains. "We were told then they would be serving about 250. As we got closer, the numbers began to change."

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison challenged Texas State Society board member Rob Hosford, manager of government relations

and public affairs for the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association (TSCRA), to serve Texas beef at the gathering.

"B3R Beef immediately came to mind when we began talking about the meal," Hosford says. "I'm familiar with their program and feel their operation and product would showcase Texas and the beef we produce."

B3R's signature beef features an all-natural, hormone-free product. Retained-ownership cattle are fed only in approved feedlots. They are harvested in the B3R processing facility in Childress; from there, boxed product is shipped to distributors from coast to coast.

The product is sold in upscale grocery stores and restaurants in 18 states. B3R cooperators are provided with complete feedlot and carcass data and are encouraged to use this information to improve their cow herds and efficiency. It is one of the most successful of its kind and has a proven track record of success.

However, getting the go-ahead to provide the beef for the gathering was not accomplished overnight. Once the product was selected by the Texas event planners, final confirmation had to come from the host hotel. Final confirmation of the selection required on-site inspection of the Bradleys' Childress facility by the Marriott Wardman Park hotel's quality assurance personnel. The inspectors visited the B3R facility in early December, and later their chefs conducted an in-house cooking and tasting test to ensure the quality and consistency of the beef before final approval was given.

Nearly 1,000 pounds (lb.) of tenderloins were shipped to the hotel for the affair. The chefs used only the center portion for the meal, which featured a filet — President Bush's favorite cut.

"We were only given about two weeks' notice as to quantity and whether we would be able to attend," Bradley says. "That was a very fast two weeks."

B3R General Manager James Henderson attended the ball with Bradley on the night prior to the inauguration.

"It was a great thrill and honor to see our name on the program as having provided the beef," Bradley says. "We were listed next to some Fortune 500 companies."

While their jobs were done once the meat safely arrived, Bradley and James still felt some tense moments when they realized the meal would be delayed nearly 90 minutes.

"I can't say enough about the super job the Marriott chefs did in handling this meal. Their waitstaff was also tremendous," Bradley explains. "To serve a warm steak that isn't overdone [at] a banquet is not easy under the best of circumstances, but to [serve] 900 people [after having been delayed for] an hour and a half was phenomenal."

As guests went through several security checks and waited for the Bushes to arrive, Lyle Lovett and others entertained them. Dinner began with a salad and wine, followed by the main course.

The B3R filet was center plate, with a sauce on the side. Fanned around the steak were Texas gulf shrimp, resting next to a medley of mixed vegetables. A chocolate cup molded into the shape of Texas was served for dessert, topped with a white chocolate lid sporting the colors of the Texas flag.

"It was a great experience and one I will never forget," Bradley says. The Texas cattlemaster saw the banquet as not only a great business opportunity, but as one having many other benefits.

"It was a tremendous morale booster for our employees," she says. "They were proud to be a part of something so important. It made them feel good to know they had a hand in serving the president and all the others a great steak. It also shed a positive light on our entire industry."

"During the weeks leading up to the inauguration, I read and saw many stories that focused on what the president and all those gathered in Washington were going to eat. Beef was always at the top of the list. President Bush gives beef a great endorsement. He's the best spokesperson our industry could ask for."

