



# Illinois Meat Company Adapts to Changing Times

Once a small, family-owned processing facility, Rocke's Meating Haus, Morton, Ill., has strived since 1937 to offer only the highest quality products. This mission remains with the company's third generation.

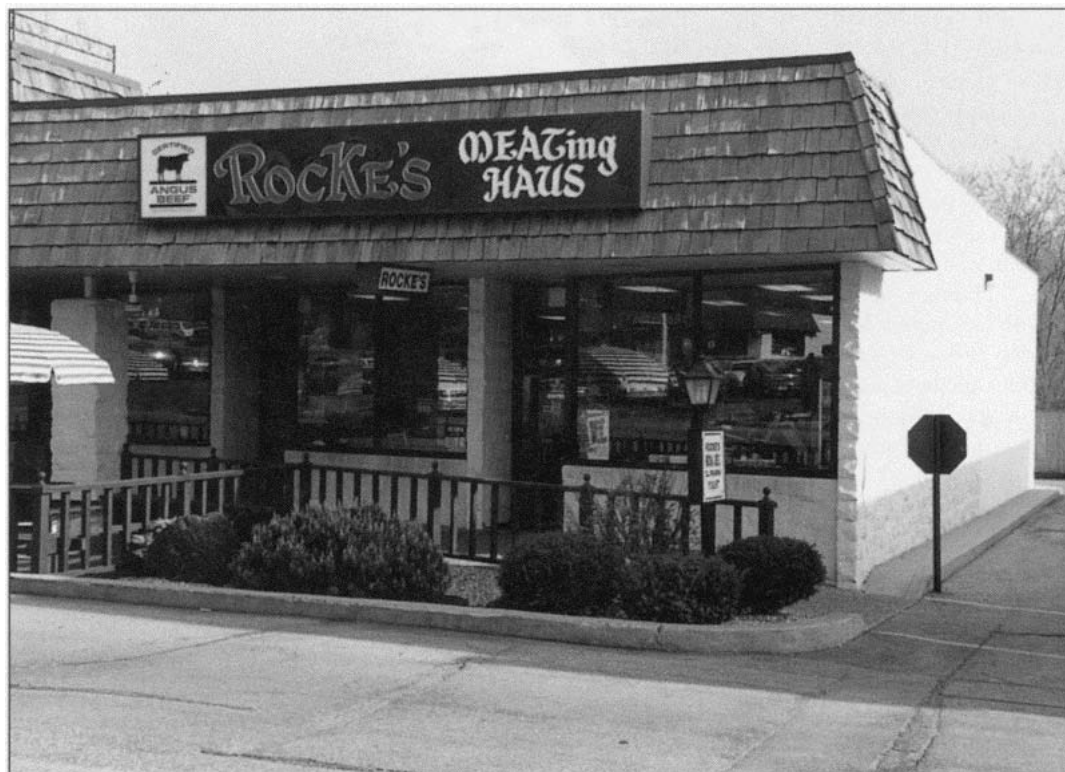
"What has changed is we've pursued different markets to find an outlet for products we offer," says Jon Rocke, president.

When expanding operations in 1971 to include a retail store, Rocke's Meating Haus began its transition to Rocke's Meating Haus. This transition was completed in 1984 when the company stopped processing cattle and hogs. To Wayne Rocke, the founder's son and president at the time, it became "a brand new 50-year-old company."

Rocke's could no longer guarantee customers the quality of beef they once received from the Angus-type cattle it purchased. Customer perception even changed. "They thought we quit doing everything that made us special," Jon says.

Although the company's first interest in Certified Angus Beef™ product was at retail, its initial involvement with the Certified Angus Beef Program was as a licensed food service distributor.

The company had good initial success as a licensed food service distributor due to a favorable beef market and good supply, says Jon. Nearly 95 percent of Rocke's food service beef sales were Certified Angus Beef product. "We brought on the product to be our only beef line," Jon says.



Rocke's Meating Haus store, Peoria, Ill., guarantees customers quality beef

Along came more change. The Peoria chef's association ceased to exist. Also, tight supplies caused several accounts to leave the A13 Program. "Local restaurants can't demand menu prices that those in a metropolitan area can," Jon explains. Rocke's still boasts a shining star in the food service market - Stephanie's of Peoria, which has been licensed since March 1986. For Chef John Pawula, it was immediate acceptance. "I wouldn't use and haven't used anything else," Pawula says. Due to declining interest at the restaurant level, Rocke's Certified Angus Beef product commitment expanded in retail, deli, mail order and convenience items.

At retail, Rocke's used to feed the family with beef side sales and fruit and vegetable truckload sales. "Consumers shifted in economies of eating from filling the home freezer with bulk quantities to picking it up at the store on the way home," Jon says.

When Rocke's opened its Morton store in 1971, it started one of the areas first deli cases. Deli continues to be a growing segment for the company.

A full-time chef was hired to oversee the preparation of as many as 60 fresh salads. Also, tables, chairs and all the necessities for an eat-in deli were recently added to each store. One of the popular items is Certified Angus Beef roast beef sandwiches.

In the early '80s, Rocke's en-

tered the mail order business. Certified Angus Beef product is the only beef offered through the catalog. Jon describes mail order as a full distribution avenue and growing business.

In 1988 a second Rocke's retail store was opened in Peoria. Promotions are now centered around holidays and include a quarterly newsletter.

One of Rocke's current and future challenges is providing convenience for its customers. "It is as big of a competitor as quality," Jon says. "We force customers to make an extra stop because they can't buy everything here."

His answer is convenience items. Rocke's developed a pre-cooked, heat-and-serve slice of prime rib for consumer convenience. It was introduced in

**STORY BY CRYSTAL MEIER, CAB PROGRAM**

the stores' service cases so consumer questions could be answered.

The next step was marketing the Certified Angus Beef prime rib slice, and a USDA Choice version, on a larger scale. Jon worked with a few larger retailers to get the product into their stores. However, it often went straight into self-service cases. Consumers were unfamiliar with it and did not buy it.

Jon wants to improve Roche's marketing technology for the prime rib slice before re-offering the product to large chains. "The product has to sell itself," he says. He is also looking into promotional material that may help "sell the sizzle."

Jon maintains that convenience is the key to future success. "We have to continue focusing on it," he says. Also, he wants his customers to know that fast can also be best.

Although Wayne recently retired from the business, the company is still family owned

and operated. Jon and his wife, Jolene, assist at the retail store, when needed. Wayne continues

to help out during the November/December holiday rush.

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