

"It was my wife's birthday, and she wanted to have a good steak dinner. We had young children, so we looked for a casual steakhouse to enjoy a meal with the whole family.

"The place we went to sounded great; however, the steak and meal were awful! It was the first time I refused to pay for a dinner. It ruined my wife's birthday."

Edd Hendee, owner/operator of the Taste of Texas restaurant, says he later found out this restaurant was serving non-USDA graded, low quality steaks to its customers.

Coincidentally, a few days later Hendee's distributor delivered two Certified Angus Beef strip steaks for him to try.

"I cooked the strips. When I was half-way done eating the first one, I knew this was the best beef I had ever eaten," says Hendee.

After re-tasting and testing, he decided to serve Certified Angus Beef product in the Taste of Texas restaurant and became licensed to display the Certified Angus Beef trademark and name on his menu. Hendee says he chose CAB product because it was a high quality beef item that customers would appreciate.

Hendee started Taste of Texas with his wife, Nina, in 1977. "Until we introduced Certified Angus Beef, we tried to be everything to everybody," he says. They began to focus on beef and to promote their restaurant as a great place for steaks. Their success has been phenomenal.

"We began by cleaning our menu to reflect an emphasis on steaks," says Hendee. Then they educated employees and customers about the high quality, Certified Angus Beef steaks being served.

The Hendees added a butcher shop to their restaurant so customers could watch steaks being cut. They were building the Taste of Texas to be famous for steaks, he said, so customers' attention was focused on steaks.

Since CAB product was introduced to the Taste of Texas in 1986, sales have increased almost 600 percent. This year's sales are projected to be \$6 million.

When CAB product was introduced in the restaurant, customers began responding to the promotions.

TASTE OF TEXAS

*Certified Angus Beef
provides the "taste"
at this famous
restaurant.*

by Cindy Folck



"I began with a guarantee that if a customer didn't think his steak was excellent, his meal was free," says Hendee.

Another promotion that was used was an ambassador pass program. If a regular customer with the ambassador pass brought a friend to dinner, the customer would receive a free meal.

"We've built many of our customers one at a time with word-of-mouth advertising," says Hendee.

And those customers keep coming back for more. Recently, the Hendees built a new Taste of Texas restaurant. It's located less than one mile from the previous location. The project cost \$2.3 million, including land costs. Seating capacity of the new Taste of Texas is 315 people; it employs a staff of 133 people. The average turnover of customers at lunch is two times and three times at dinner on a

week night. Only dinner is served on weekends, and the average turnover is at least four times.

"You can't take your customers' money for granted," says Hendee, "Everything on our menu is excellent because we are committed to our customers."

Eighty percent of the people who visit Taste of Texas enjoy a steak for dinner. Hendee says the other entrees on the menu — lobster, shrimp and chicken — are there for the regular customers who come often.

Customers also have a selection of 120 wines from which to choose and about 320 bottles are sold each week.

"The most expensive thing in a restaurant is an empty chair," says Hendee. An empty chair doesn't contribute to labor or overhead costs. "Use Certified Angus Beef, or you take your chances."

Hendee emphasizes that customers expect the best when they dine out.

To help promote the CAB product, Hendee says they have conducted taste tests in a local mall through Houston restaurant promotions.

"These have been successful because we've gotten the taste of our product in the customer's mouth," says Hendee. He admits it may seem expensive to buy ribeyes for consumers to sample, but the returns make up for it.



"We have those people as customers the next night," he says.

The Taste of Texas focuses customers' attention on steaks. "Famous for Steaks" is proclaimed on the large sign in front, on the menu front and even on the horse-drawn carriage.

This focus has elevated the Taste of Texas to be one of the prominent steakhouses in Houston. Hendee says CAB has helped his business because of its dependable, high quality.

Delivering an excellent meal to his customers every time is important to Hendee. "If I'm not committed to my customer, how can he be committed to me?" he says.

This restaurant has been built brick by brick by establishing customers for the long-term. "Certified Angus Beef is for the person who truly cares about customer satisfaction," he says.

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(top) Edd and Nina Hendee, owners of the Taste of Texas restaurant, Houston.

(middle) This sign in front of the restaurant proclaims what the Hendee's steakhouse is known for.

(bottom) The Taste of Texas restaurant is decorated with Texas memorabilia, collected and arranged by Nina Hendee.

