



The best steak in town is

Out on the Lone Prairie

Story and photos by Raylene Nickel

It's 4 in the afternoon, and Robert Boehm has just parked his haying equipment on Interstate Angus Ranch, west of Mandan, N.D. But he is far from done for the day. Now it's time to head over to the stylish new structure a stone's throw from his home.

The building is crafted partly of stones gathered from these rolling fields where Boehm grew up, and it sits on a low ridge of the family ranch along the northern edge of

Interstate 94. Surrounded by wide-open prairie, there's some irony in saying this is the place to get the best steak in town. But that's what people are saying, and for two years Roby's Supper Club has been gaining popularity as a fine-dining and nightspot in the Bismarck-Mandan area.

What sets the supper club apart from the competition? "I get a lot of compliments from customers on the beef we serve here,"

► **Left:** Robert Boehm is a rancher by day and a chef and restaurant owner by night. "I'm promoting the Angus beef product that I raise by giving people a taste of the very best there is," he says.

Boehm says. "In fact, a number of people have told me it's the best they've ever had. I believe *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) is the best beef in the world. The program guarantees taste and tenderness."

He got into the business to give people a chance to taste — as the brand tagline says — *Angus beef at its best*.

"I raise registered Angus cattle," Boehm says. "I decided to open a supper club to promote the high-quality beef that I raise."

As if owning and managing the restaurant isn't enough, Boehm serves as the chef as well. His zealous belief in CAB quality means using no cooking practices that might mask the pure taste and texture. Boehm puts no marinades or sauces on his entrées of ribeye, tenderloin, New York strip and prime rib. He cooks the beef in an infrared ceramic oven, which sears the meat both top and bottom without drying it out.

To subtly encourage guests to savor the pure beef flavor, Boehm doesn't place steak sauces on the tables. During the brief breaks he takes to mingle with guests in the club's two dining rooms, if Boehm notices customers who have asked for steak sauce, he'll casually suggest they go ahead and try the beef without the sauce. Most often, he says, guests find they don't need the sauce after all.

"Acceptance among area diners has been great," Boehm says. "To keep meeting people's expectations, we don't try to cut corners in quality." That's true for the non-beef items, too. Roby's Supper Club serves exclusively cold-water seafood.

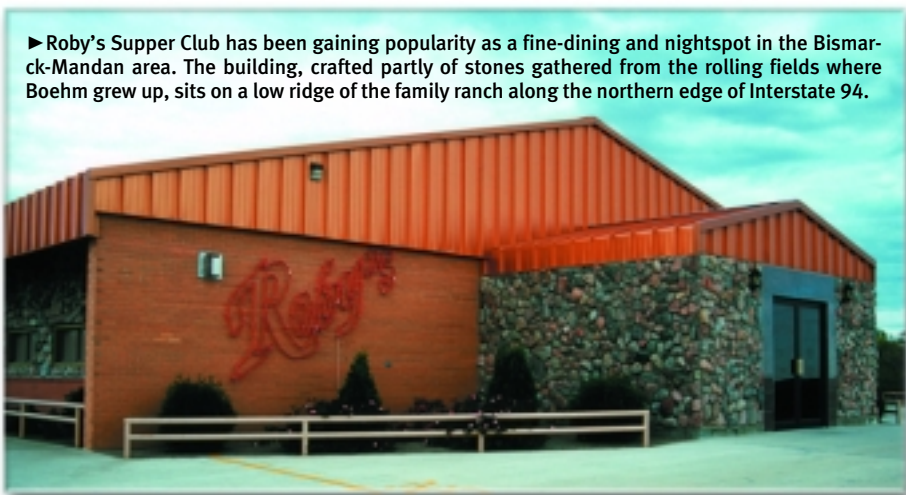
By serving only beef and seafood entrées, Boehm says he can control quality better than if the menu offered a broad range of main dishes.

The large investment that might have been required to build the supper club was reduced because Boehm did most of the labor. From designing the 5,000-square-foot structure to gathering the field stones and mortaring them into the walls, to pouring the cement for the parking lot, Boehm used very little outside help. It took him two and a half years to build Roby's, with its capacity to seat 150 guests.

Without question, the hours Boehm works to keep both the ranch and the supper club running are long. But it's a schedule he says he enjoys.

At the ranch

At the ranching end of his operation,



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 76

Out on the Lone Prairie CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74

Boehm manages a herd of 400 registered Angus cows. He sells some 80 purebred bulls each year by private treaty from the ranch, along with a number of purebred yearling and bred heifers. The steers and the bottom end of the heifers are backgrounded on the ranch.

He tends the cattle and harvests hay without the help of employees. His older brother Marvin manages the ranch's 2,000 acres of farmland, which produces the grain for backgrounding.

On days when the supper club is open — from Tuesday through Saturday each week — Boehm spends most of the time in the forenoons and early afternoons working on the ranch. He takes a brief break at noon to go to the supper club to start cooking the prime rib for the evening guests. Then at 4 p.m. he returns to the club while it is still quiet. The lounge is open from 2 p.m. to 1 a.m., and the supper club from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Since few supper guests arrive before 5

p.m., the interlude gives Boehm and his full-time manager, Michelle Berger, time to discuss business matters, attend to details in the lounge and dining room, and meet with salespeople. Besides Berger, Boehm employs 13 people part time in the supper club.

"Some days do get hectic," he says. "But when I get up in the morning, I feel good. I feel like I'm accomplishing what I set out to do: I'm promoting the Angus beef product that I raise by giving people a taste of the very best there is." 