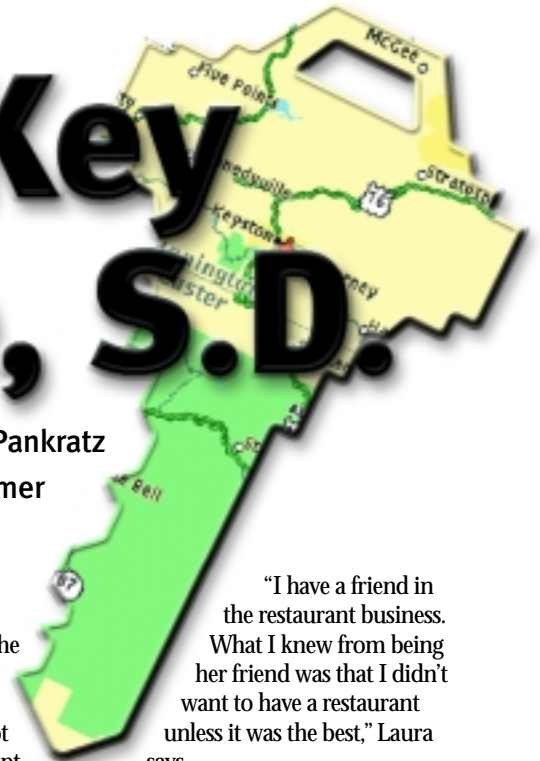


# Angus Is Key in Keystone, S.D.



Drawing from their experience raising Angus cattle, Duane and Laura Pankratz of Roth LaGrand Angus Ranch are now taking CAB® to the consumer through their South Dakota restaurant, Creekside Dining.

Story and photos by **Kindra Gordon**

Located just a few miles from Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Keystone, S.D., is a typical tourist town where many stop to buy a T-shirt or coffee mug with an image of the presidential monument on it. But a unique restaurant in Keystone is giving folks an even better souvenir — a dining experience that patrons refer to as “the best steak they’ve ever eaten.”

The restaurant, which is a licensed *Certified Angus Beef*®

(CAB®) provider, is called Creekside Dining. It’s owned and operated by Duane and Laura Pankratz, who also own Roth LaGrand Angus Ranch in Freeman, S.D. Anyone who steps into this restaurant can’t help but notice that this is an establishment operated by a family who knows and shows cattle.

The interior walls are sided with barn wood and sheet metal and are adorned with championship banners, photos, ribbons and trophies that Roth seedstock earned in recent years.

“We wanted to bring in the atmosphere of the farm by displaying memorabilia from our Angus cattle,” says

Laura, who manages the restaurant. She adds that the flashy ribbons and photos attract a lot of attention and prompt people in the restaurant to ask questions — which is precisely what Laura had hoped for.

“When people ask about the ribbons and photos, it gives us the opportunity to educate them about Angus cattle and why the CAB steak or prime rib they have just eaten was so good,” Laura says.

## Recipe for success

Because of the premium CAB reputation, the Pankratzes, who have no previous restaurant experience, felt comfortable opening Creekside Dining in July 2001.

“I have a friend in the restaurant business. What I knew from being her friend was that I didn’t want to have a restaurant unless it was the best,” Laura says.

So, when the opportunity to buy a hotel and restaurant in Keystone, where Duane and Laura own the Borglum Historical Center (a museum about the man who carved Mount Rushmore), they knew that with CAB and a fabulous chef their restaurant would be “the best.”

In her search for a great chef, Laura says, “I started praying about it, and it’s really a story of fate, because I mentioned it to a friend in California and through a friend of a friend we met Executive Chef T. Bear.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



► Chef T. Bear (left) and Laura Pankratz, owner of Creekside Dining, Keystone, S.D., stand in front of the champion Angus ribbons that adorn the walls of the restaurant. Pankratz and her husband, Duane, also own Roth LaGrand Angus Ranch. They share their ribbons so customers can ask about them, allowing her to tell them why the steak they ate is so good.



► At Creekside Dining, *Certified Angus Beef*® steaks and prime rib dominate the menu selection. The Pankratzes say they wanted to offer the best if they were going to be in the restaurant business.

## Angus Is Key in Keystone, S.D. CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

At the time, Chef Bear was based in Sedona, Ariz., where he worked as a chef and a consultant, opening numerous restaurants. He interviewed for the position, was intrigued by the challenge and relocated to the Black Hills about 10 days before Creekside Dining opened.

Chef Bear also liked the restaurant's connection to CAB. He says, "I've been a licensed provider of CAB through other restaurants for a number of years. I prefer the product because it's the best there is with regard to quality, flavor and consistency."

With the chef in place and the menu set, their final hurdle was simply getting the CAB product. At the time the restaurant opened, none of the foodservice suppliers in the Black Hills area were certified to provide CAB. "It all had to be special-ordered," Chef Bear says.

By the time the 2002 tourist season rolled around, they'd convinced their supplier, SYSCO, to offer CAB. Today, all of their CAB product comes from IBP Inc. or Imperial Meats, and all steaks are hand-cut to Chef Bear's specifications.

"He's gotten a reputation for accepting only the best," Laura says of Chef Bear.

### 'Melt in your mouth' menu items

At Creekside Dining, CAB steaks and prime rib dominate the menu selection. With a King Cut prime rib at 20 to 28 ounces (oz.), few complain that the servings are too small. Steaks are also served with four savory sauces created by Chef Bear: Chasseur "Hunter," Chimmichuri, Marsala Wine and Herbed Butter.

If a prime rib, filet mignon, T-bone or top sirloin doesn't tempt your taste buds, the menu also includes pasta, seafood,

"presidential" pizzas and world famous desserts — Chef Bear and his peach cobbler have been featured with Regis Philbin on national TV.

For folks who fall in love with something on the menu, everything is made from scratch and, if you ask, they'll provide the recipe. "As long as you're not putting in a restaurant across the street from me, we want people to be able to recreate this at home," Chef Bear says.

The same is true for the steaks. "We want people to know that they can find CAB at the grocery store," Laura says. She adds, "Our motto is to satisfy the customer. We want everyone to have such a wonderful experience that they don't want to leave."

Thus far, the restaurant has received regular praise from customers. "Probably a night doesn't go by that someone doesn't say, 'That's the best steak I've ever had,'" Laura says.

She admits, "Our restaurant is out of the ordinary for a tourist town. We're higher priced than most restaurants in Keystone." Steak prices range from \$19.95 to \$26.95.

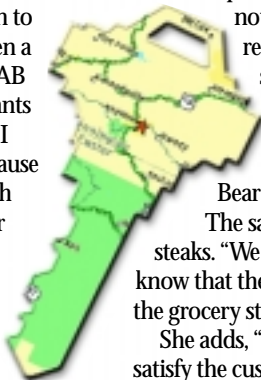
But Chef Bear adds, "I think most people are willing to pay more for a steak when they know it's going to be the best."

And indeed they do. "People find us at the beginning of their trip and they are here for dinner every night," Laura says.

Creekside Dining is open Mother's Day weekend through September and hosts special parties during the off-season. The restaurant includes a patio for outdoor dining and offers scenic views of Mount Rushmore.



► Duane Pankratz established the Borglum Historical Center in Keystone to educate tourists about Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor of Mount Rushmore.



## Catering to tourists

In addition to Creekside Dining, Duane and Laura Pankratz own and operate several other tourist entities in Keystone, S.D. — each of which they strive to make unique. More than 20 years ago Duane established the Borglum Historical Center in Keystone. The center is a museum that tells the story of Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor of Mount Rushmore.

At the Rushmore View Inn adjacent to Creekside Dining, all of the rooms are furnished with rustic log furniture crafted by a local artisan. No two rooms are decorated alike; even the comforters on each bed are unique. You'll also find five pillows on every bed.

"It seems when we stay at a motel all of the pillows are used by Duane to watch TV and none are left for me. So I wanted to make sure each room had plenty of pillows," says Laura.

Laura has spent a lot of time adding special elements to make their guests' stays extra special: in-room saltwater taffy that's made in Keystone, Starbucks coffee in each room and a complimentary Mount Rushmore mug for guests to take with them when they go. "Our continental breakfast is to-go so guests can

► From dining to lodging, the Pankratzes have spent a lot of time adding special touches to their businesses near Mount Rushmore in Keystone, S.D.



eat it for a midnight snack or take it with them and eat it while they are touring the Black Hills," she adds.

Laura has also placed journals in each hotel room for people to write their thoughts, ideas and vacation highlights. Many times the pages also contain rave reviews about Creekside Dining.

It is those special touches and attention to service that have contributed to their success. Laura admits that starting their restaurant was a challenge. "We hosted a lot of parties and asked people to bring a friend. Word of mouth has really been great." In the beginning, they had a small staff of five, and she served tables. "You do whatever it takes," she says.

Today, they still rely on word of mouth for advertising. "But it's the quality of the food and customer service that bring people back," she says.

Of their venture into these businesses, Laura says, "God has always been an important part of our life and has blessed us greatly. Our desire is to develop a place for family gatherings and conferences with a Christian thread."

She adds, "Our passion is to fulfill God's plan for our lives to the best of our ability by providing great service, great food, God's love and *Certified Angus Beef*."