

# Louisville's Ace in the Hole

BY ELIZABETH TOW

*Dillon's Steakhouse focuses on quality and employees.*



CAB PROGRAM PHOTOS

**W**hat do you get when you join Dillon's Steakhouse and a 200-year-old historical house? A great steakhouse with the capability of handling special events, business functions and tourist groups. Dillon's Steakhouse in Louisville, Ky., is attached to Cherry Springs, widely believed to be the second-oldest house in Jefferson County.

Jude McConnell, restaurant manager, says the restaurant's niche is not only its great *Certified Angus Beef*™ steaks, but also its ability to seat groups of 10 to 100 people. Dillon's Steakhouse specializes in large groups the competition can't handle. From last-minute business meetings to a planned wedding rehearsal, Dillon's Steakhouse will host more than 200 events this year.

Says McConnell, "It's our job to make sure everything goes right."

**What's the ace in the hole** for Dillon's customers? The restaurant offers specialized menus for each occasion, doesn't charge for the room or decorations, and gives gift certificates as special prizes.

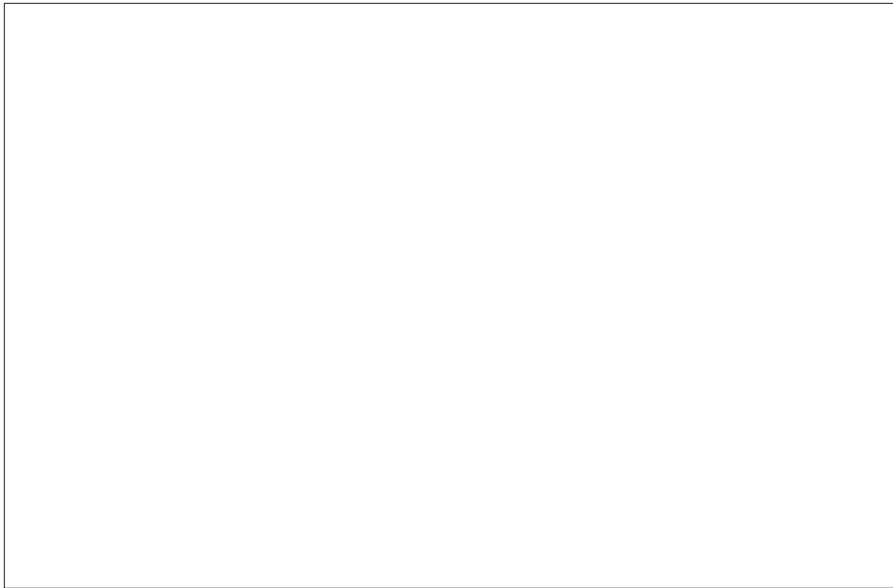
Dillon's Steakhouse started serving *Certified Angus Beef* product two years ago. Prior to this decision, sales were declining 9%-17% each year. The first year *Certified Angus Beef* product was used, the slide in sales stopped; there was a double-digit increase the second year.



**Above:** Restaurant manager Jude McConnell leads the educational and brand-recognition efforts for *Certified Angus Beef*™ product. Upper left: Dillon's Steakhouse capitalizes on the *Certified Angus Beef* brand's quality image with prominent logo usage on its sign and on the building's exterior and interior.

McConnell's biggest concern about switching to *Certified Angus Beef* product was if clients would be turned off by the small increase in menu prices before they were turned on by the quality of the product. But since introducing it, a new clientele looking for quality steaks frequents the restaurant.

**Dillon's Steakhouse also has focused** on increasing all quality aspects for the restaurant. McConnell explains, "I was no longer concerned with what the competition was doing. I focused my energy on what we could do better to benefit our customers." McConnell also added that new upscale steakhouses opening in Louisville



The staff gathered for a photo at the restaurant entrance after a training session.

have raised the popularity of steaks. Dillon's Steakhouse provides its target clientele with a great-tasting steak at a reasonable price.

The commitment to quality and the focus on improving the entire restaurant have resulted in exciting benefits. Several bone-in *Certified Angus Beef* steaks introduced as specials will soon become permanent menu items. Although liquor sales have experienced a slight decrease, wine sales are growing. Employees promote the entire ambiance of the steakhouse, resulting in higher sales of and a larger variety of wines.

The restaurant is experiencing new traffic patterns, with one of the largest increases being in lunch volume. McConnell attributes this to more businesses in the area and customers ordering more dinner entrées and steaks during lunch. In addition, a new church in the area has resulted in rejuvenated Sunday business.

Louisville also attracts many large events during the year, such as the Kentucky Derby, professional golf tournaments and the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE). Dillon's Steakhouse welcomes these potential new guests with a dinner discount card displayed in area hotel rooms.

**What's the restaurant's key** to success besides the best steaks in town? Its outstanding employees.

Dillon's Steakhouse seeks ideal employees who are "people with futures and goals" to whom to offer long-term rewards. McConnell attributes this commitment to quality employees to following the

successful lead of Taste of Texas in Houston, a 15-year CAB Program licensee.

The three restaurant managers at Dillon's Steakhouse focus on what they can do to retain good people and put out fires before they start, rather than constantly training new employees.

A major piece to the puzzle, according to McConnell, is scheduling. Dillon's Steakhouse uses a bid sheet to rank priority for time off during busy times and holidays. The employees rank what holiday or major event is most important to them, then the managers do their best to accommodate.

Another perk to working at Dillon's Steakhouse is a time-off bonus. Employees who have worked at least five years earn an annual three-week paid vacation. "You never want employees to have to choose between work and other priorities. Nobody wins," McConnell says.

For the *Certified Angus Beef* Restaurant Contest, Dillon's Steakhouse offered a special incentive to staff by doubling the cash prizes.

The restaurant also holds staff training sessions for the product, utilizing the expertise of its distributor, Irish Hill Foods. Dillon's Steakhouse is reaping the rewards of this investment with lower turnover and more long-term employees.

The challenges Dillon's Steakhouse faces are continuing to maintain quality employees and making the restaurant the biggest and best in Louisville. McConnell's solution, "We'll take small steps, not let one bad day ruin the next and serve *Certified Angus Beef* product, of course!"



## PROFILE: Dillon's Steakhouse

RESTAURANT LOCATION:  
2101 S. Hustborne  
Parkway, Louisville, Ky.  
OPENED: Oct. 9, 1990  
LICENSED: Nov. 19, 1997  
TOTAL SEATS: 185 in  
restaurant, 100 in Cherry  
Springs historical house  
AVG. CHECK:  
\$15.67/person, including  
liquor  
AVG. COVERS PER WEEK:  
3,200-3,400  
BEST-SELLING APPETIZER:  
Cheese fries  
BEST-SELLING ENTRÉE:  
6-oz. *Certified Angus  
Beef*™ filet  
BEST-SELLING DESSERT:  
Rocky Mountain High, a  
homemade brownie with  
ice cream and chocolate  
syrup  
CUSTOMER FAVORITE:  
Potato bread

### **Other CAB-licensed restaurants in the Louisville area**

*While you're in Louisville  
for the North American  
International Livestock  
Exposition, you may want  
to visit Dillon's or one of  
these other licensed  
restaurants:*

ROMANO'S MACARONI  
GRILL  
401 S. Hurstborne Parkway  
(502) 423-9220

GENNY'S DINER  
2223 Frankfort Ave.  
(502) 893-0923

WINNER'S CIRCLE  
RESTAURANT  
1325 S. Hurstborne  
Parkway  
(502) 426-2600, Ext. 162

JOE'S CRAB SHACK  
131 River Rd.  
(502) 568-1171