

# When Two Worlds Collide



PHOTOS BY DEANNA WALENCIAK

New York City chef meets Montana ranchers and finds a common thread.

by Jennifer Kiko

## Sharing the experience

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand celebrates its 30th anniversary this month. To honor the occasion, the company will host a Western-themed media reception Oct. 16 at the Bull and Bear Steakhouse in New York's Waldorf=Astoria Hotel. Members of the media will taste CAB product, hear about Chef John Doherty's travels to Sitz Angus Ranch in Montana, and see video footage of the trip. They will also meet other ranchers who raise this high-quality product.

The media reception, which culminates a complete media effort surrounding the brand's 30th anniversary, is designed to spark reporter interest and initiate stories in major publications.

The ultimate goal is to continue to position the brand as the industry leader with media and consumers.



From the time he was a young cook, John Doherty believed the quality of his work would speak for itself.

As executive chef at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York City, Doherty has cooked for more presidents, royalty and heads-of-state than any other chef in the country. The Bull and Bear Steakhouse, the hotel's signature restaurant, is one of a few serving exclusively *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand Prime.

In June, Doherty set out for Sitz Angus Ranch in Dillon, Mont. The goal of his 2,000-mile journey was to discover what makes the brand the best in the business. He tracked beef's journey from pasture to plate and determined what makes CAB the "elite meat," as Donna Sitz calls it.

The Sitz family has raised Angus cattle for more than 80 years. Environmental stewardship is a cornerstone of the business. The family's mantra: Take care of the land, and the land will take care of you. It is that philosophy that has fortified the family

operation since Donna and Bob Sitz moved to Montana in 1960.

After the loss of the family patriarch in 1989, sons Bob and Jim Sitz took over. Today, Bob operates the Harrison Ranch and Jim operates the Dillon Ranch. Arvin Arthun, whom Donna married in 1996, is marketing manager. Sitz Angus has 1,500 head of cattle, including about 500 bulls.

## Quest for quality

Upon arrival, Doherty greets the ranchers with a simple explanation: "The reason I came was to see where this product — the beef I am so passionate about — came from. I take great pride in creating delicious food and making people happy.

"Pulling a piece of meat off the shelf and cooking it and serving it just isn't enough," he says. "I wanted to come out and see where it all begins ... what it is that makes it different and sets it apart from everything else."

As the Sitzes show and tell Doherty about their cattle, he's especially taken with their

► **Above:** Between chicken and beef, there is no comparison, Chef John Doherty of the Waldorf=Astoria tells Donna Sitz. "Beef reigns as No. 1 and keeps climbing. It just keeps becoming more and more popular."

passion and commitment to quality. Those are feelings in common, and he observes, “One wouldn’t work without the other.”

Doherty’s culinary philosophy is simple: quality ingredients, classic technique and a focus on flavor. That’s the appeal of the CAB brand, which, he says, is “the tastiest and best eating-quality beef.” He wanted to know, though, why Donna’s family is committed to the Angus breed. Her response is quick and simple.

“None of the others are as good as black cattle. Black cows do it all.”

The chef’s next question: “What makes your product different from everything else on the market?”

“There’s nothing better than knowing you’re raising the type of beef that is good for the plate,” Donna answers. “That is the ultimate goal: to provide wholesome, nutritious meat for the table. And it’s good to talk to you, the man preparing the beef and creating that eating experience.”

Doherty quickly affirms that the Sitz family’s dedication to quality, like that of other committed Angus producers, is making a difference in the market.

“Our staff explains to customers just how special the beef is. People nod and listen. How much attention they pay to it I’m not sure, but every night there are customers who take a taste of this meat. They stop the conversation and tell us this is the best-tasting steak they’ve had in their life. I know they’re not just saying it’s the best, because I know,” Doherty says, “it is.”

“So thanks to you and your family for all the hard work that you do, because it really makes my life easier. And it helps me stay competitive and makes people happy, which is what it really is all about for us,” he says.

“Well, I need to ask you how beef compares to chicken in the sell,” Donna asks.

“There is no comparison, not even close,” Doherty assures her. “Beef reigns as No. 1 and keeps climbing. It just keeps becoming more and more popular.”

“That’s what I want to hear,” she answers with a grin.

## Road to success

When raising Angus cattle, Donna says, the goal is to produce the very best for consumers. “The *Certified Angus Beef* brand is, by far, the best. Cattle have to meet certain criteria and not every animal can make the brand.”

Jim Sitz says the family works with customers to raise a better product, not

only through health care management, but also through selecting genetics that will take cattle to the next level — cattle that, he hopes, will qualify for CAB.

“You know, there is a whole list of things that we can do to better ourselves and our cattle, and we’re trying to do our part in training our customers. Hopefully the feedlots are doing everything they can to raise this product. Everybody has a hand in this,” Jim says.

Doherty gives credence to a basic belief that there is a market for the highest-quality beef available. “We have to hope that through economic downturns and global changes, people will still choose the better product,” he says.

Though their worlds are strikingly different, Doherty and the Sitzes agree sacrificing quality is never an alternative.

“We have to stay ahead of the game and raise the best quality cattle we can,” Jim says. “I have four kids. Through the CAB program, we’ll continue to create demand for my customers’ cattle, which will in turn create demand for my bulls and, hopefully, keep me in business for the next generation.”

And Doherty will continue to give his customers what they want — mouthwatering, high-quality beef.

“We are partners in a sense,” Donna says. “We’re

► **Right:** “Pulling a piece of meat off the shelf and cooking it and serving it just isn’t enough,” Chef Doherty (center) told Bob (left) and Jim Sitz as he visited the ranch this summer. “I wanted to come out and see where it all begins ... what it is that makes it different and sets it apart from everything else.”



► **Left:** The Sitz family works with customers to raise a better product, Jim explains, not only through health care management, but also through selecting genetics that will take cattle to the next level — cattle that, he hopes, will qualify for CAB.

out here every day working to provide our customers with the best cattle so they can provide your [Doherty’s] customers with *Certified Angus Beef* product.”

It’s that thread, that partnership, that ties them together.

Donna says when she met Doherty she felt as though she’d known him all her life. “Here you are, all the way from New York, and I’ve never been to New York. I find out you are taking our customers’ product and making it even more popular than we realize. To think,” Donna exclaims, “that our beef might be on the plate of the President of the United States!”

“It will be,” Doherty assures her, “in September.”



**Author’s Note:** (Millionaire William Waldorf Astor opened the 13-story Waldorf Hotel in New York City. Four years later, The Waldorf was joined by the 17-story Astoria Hotel, erected on an adjacent site by Waldorf’s cousin, John Jacob Astor IV. The corridor built to connect the two buildings became an enduring symbol of the combined Waldorf and Astoria hotels and is represented by the “=” in The Waldorf=Astoria).