



Beaches and Beef

Like family, top Hawaiian retailer and CAB rely on each other.

Story & photos by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Pick any beach on the main Hawaiian Islands on any given Sunday and you'll likely see tents popped up and lawn chairs dotting the coastline; fishing poles, Frisbees and flip-flops; bikinis, barbecues and beef.

"The family gathering, whether you're blood family or not, is much more frequent in their culture than in other parts of the country," says Heidi Schroeder, executive account manager for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. "The gathering on the weekends, a 'party for any reason' — that celebratory, people coming together and sharing food — is very common."

Sunshine, turquoise waters and good company provide a nice backdrop. Hawaii's largest locally owned retailer makes it their mission to add to the ambiance with quality ingredients. In fact, their motto is, "Food, family and friends."

"The reason we're here is because we really

care about the people of Hawaii, and we want to serve them and be there for them," says Stacy Waiiau-Omori, the company's vice president of sales and operations.

As part of that commitment, the 33-store chain became a CAB-licensed partner in 2008.

CAB on the islands

"We really launched them with a bang," Schroeder says. "It was one of the most comprehensive retail launches we've ever had," with store manager training sessions, radio spots and all-day meat manager sessions.

Thomas Tangaro has been cutting meat for 36 years and is currently managing the meat department at the Pupukeya, Hawaii, store on the North Shore. He was skeptical of the switch from Select grade to the brand.

"I thought we were going to have another flop. Now I'm going to retire on this," he says. The results sold Tangaro.

"We got into CAB and just grew. It's so easy to talk about the product," he says with the same smile he uses when calling his customers by name. Ribeyes are his personal favorite, and any given weekend, Tangaro might be at the helm of the barbecue grill.

"My family will say, 'We'll buy the meat, but you have to cook it,'" he shares.

Having that firsthand experience with the beef, all the way to consumption, really empowers employees to help their customers.

"Our butchers are craftsmen," Waiiau-Omori says. "They want to feel proud about what they put on the counter."

At the initial rollout, the company also included Foodland gift certificates with a payroll run, so every employee could purchase a CAB steak and "know what the hype was about," Schroeder says.

"Training is really important. The more

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our people know, the better they're going to execute and deliver on whatever programs we have in place," Waiau-Omori says. "What better way to train them than to try it?"

For years, meat sales were flat, but they saw an immediate spike after the transition from Select to the premium brand.

"We captured a lot of customers going to *Certified Angus Beef*," says Patrick Ambrosio, meat manager at the newer Kapolei, Hawaii, store. "It's not hard to sell high-quality beef."

Maybe that's why he gets to work at 4 a.m. with a youthful enthusiasm to do just that. He's up for anything from filling orders and cutting meat to answering cooking questions out in front of the meatcase.

Bill Haynes, Foodland's director of meat and seafood, says that's part of its customer service philosophy.

"Don't wait for the customer to approach you, but you approach the customer and ask what help they might need," he says.

In 2016, Foodland doubled down on efforts to move quality beef by moving to almost exclusively CAB in their meatcase and featuring the product on front-page ads.

"We've just converted our customers to *Certified Angus Beef*," Haynes says. "They're willing to pay that extra little amount to get quality and go home and have a good eating experience."

From 2015 to 2016 CAB volume grew 30%, and middle-meat steak sales tripled.

A January grilling feature took advantage of lower middle-meat prices while the rest of the country centered on roasts.

"Because it's Hawaii — it's always nice over here, so everybody's grilling," Ambrosio says, noting cuts from the chuck are also popular on the islands.

Specialized training sessions might cover everything from the benefits of marbling to friendly competitions between meat cutter "teams," to drive home the importance of marketing unique cuts.

Like most, Ambrosio came up through the journeyman program and says the business side was the hardest part to learn.

"The biggest challenge was merchandising the meat and not wasting anything," he says.

Everyone focuses on growing sales together, Haynes says.

"We are a small enough company, so we can react. Our departments work very closely together, and it's very easy to communicate," he notes. "We're always in contact with each other, and we find out what works and we stick with it."

Last year, the company earned CAB honors as Retail Marketer of the Year for small chains, and it's consistently in the top five for CAB sales among small chains globally.

'Making it' as a meat cutter

"All of my mom's prayers have been answered," says Thomas Tangaro.

The 36-year Foodland meat cutter is just steps from the meatcase he proudly restocks each morning in his Pupukea, Hawaii, store.

Tangaro smiles at the memory of his mom lighting a candle and clutching her rosary, her 10 sons and three daughters on her mind. She knew they'd need a little faith — there were no easy breaks for the children of Filipino immigrants.

The Tangaro kids used to clean the school cafeteria to earn a token for lunch the next day. By 14, Tangaro was working in the same local packing plant as his dad, which was a stepping stone to his current position.

"I love Foodland," he says with the same emotion he might use to talk of his wife of 39 years, four kids and 15 grandkids. "What other company is going to take care of you and your family for 36 years?"

In just five months he made journeyman, a leap that typically takes a couple of years. Several decades later, he was a meat manager when Foodland switched to carrying the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand (CAB®).

"They don't have meat like us," he says of his competitors. He's proud to tell tourists and locals alike about it when they come in to buy cuts to barbecue or grill on the beach. The famous Banzai Pipeline is just down the road.

The visitors usually come for middle meats, like strips and ribeyes, regardless of what is on sale.

"They don't look at the yellow signs and buy, they just buy," he says.

As he looks toward retirement, he thinks fondly of the early mornings and the responsibility of keeping the meatcase full.

"I've dedicated my life to it," he says. The smells of fresh meat and poke seasoning mix as he reflects, "I never thought I'd come this far in life."

However, Mary Tangaro never doubted. She'd prayed for it.

"We didn't really have a far-reaching presence on each of the islands until we partnered with Foodland," Schroeder says, noting that they're "always fun to work with" and bring their own marketing flair. "They give the brand exposure to a lot of communities throughout the state."

It's a team effort, supported by company leadership and carried out by each person who interacts with consumers.

"The spirit of Foodland is *aloha*," Waiau-Omori says. "When you walk through our doors, you're going to really feel a difference because we're a family."

Or, as they say in Hawaii, "We're *ohana*."

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Editor's Note: Miranda Reiman is the assistant director of industry information for *Certified Angus Beef* LLC.



► CAB's David MacVane (far left) and John Stika (far right) present the 2016 Retail Marketer of the Year—Small Chain award to the Foodland team, represented by (continuing from left) Tricia Beman, Stacy Waiau-Omori and Andrea Williams.

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