



Trading Places

Part 1: No rest means success for North Dakota restaurateur Dale Zimmerman.

Story & photos by **Laura Conaway**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

If ever torn down, you'd want to keep the walls of North Dakota's culinary hearthstone Peacock Alley American Grill & Bar. They hold stories and secrets of a different time — which many patrons will never know and reason for others to seek a table.

When Dale Zimmerman and wife Melodie got the place in 2010, they had plans. The pair wanted the establishment and its dishes to

stand on their own, rather than a legacy from long ago.

Zimmerman couldn't quite say what he was getting into at the time. The furniture-salesman-turned-entrepreneur and now mini-mogul seemed to be barely testing the waters.

The thing about Zimmerman, though, is he knows no other way but to dive in headfirst.

"First of all, it was to prove that we could do it," the Bismarck native says, considering what was once a lack of experience in an unknown industry along with the "success" handicap naysayers attach to the oil boom.

"I like to create things, and I take pride in what we do. Plus, I want my kids to move back here," he says.



Battered, but still standing

Whether moving back or just sampling a restaurant under new ownership, walking out before 2010 and back in through Peacock's wooden door after its renovation would cause even the least impressed to take notice.

"Microwaves. Just a wall of microwaves. They were literally everywhere," Zimmerman recalls. "All you could see was the mid-section of the cooks and hear the pinging noise of the timers."

Yet that wasn't always the story. Upright in 1933 as an extension of the historical Patterson building, "the Peacock" got into its fair share of trouble by mere association.

"It's modeled after the Peacock Alley in the Waldorf Astoria in New York City," Zimmerman says of the restaurant nestled in Bismarck's center. "Ed Patterson (then owner and the building's namesake) wanted this restaurant to be like the diamond in the upper Midwest. Well, Prohibition started, and that caused some illegal activity. Peacock Alley became this famous restaurant because it was housed in an iconic building."

More than half a century later, its cracks mirror the ups and downs of a state that weathered many an economic storm. Its walls were battered but still standing.

"As many restaurants do, it had its fair share of highs and lows," he says.

Condemned, marked for teardown, the building was brought back to life, resurrected in the 1980s. A few years later, it sold and had nine straight years of double-digit decline, leading to Zimmerman's opportunity.

Renovated

"The first thing we did was get rid of all the microwaves!" Zimmerman says.

The second was to focus on beef.

"We made the decision to throw away the menus and start over," Zimmerman says. "One of the first things we did was make it beef-centric. That is, everything on our menu was going to revolve around beef because it was the closest thing, given that we're in the middle of North America, to being local."

Along with new flooring, new lights and the removal of one-too-many peacock paintings came time to explore the beef market.

"We researched, experimented and tasted" to land on the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand familiar to Angus ranchers in the nearby communities. "We saw what CAB could do for the restaurant, which is a lot, and before we knew it, had 15 different cuts on the menu." Meanwhile, business had quadrupled.

Then the phone rang.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 144



► Above & left: In a town where Peacock Alley represents all things traditional, 40 Steak & Seafood does its own thing.

Trading Places: Part 1 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 143

“It was a few years later on a Friday,” that an owner of a restaurant down the road called, he says. “I knew them from the furniture world, and they said, ‘Would you be interested in buying it? We’re going to close on Monday.’ I thought, ‘What are you talking about? How much do you even want for it?’”

They flew down on Sunday and within 20 minutes on Monday, the deal was closed. “We shook on it, went back to the restaurant and told the staff,” Zimmerman says.

Friendly competitors

In a town where Peacock Alley represents all things traditional, 40 Steak & Seafood does its own thing.

“They’re competitors, but they respect each other,” Zimmerman says of the restaurants’ executive chefs, Dusty Swenningson and Alan Abyrzo, respectively. The notion fits the restaurants just as well.

For starters, they hold different customer bases: 40, the more adult couples scene, and



► Dale Zimmerman (right) chose a beef-centric menu due to beef’s locality. He speaks with Executive Chef Alan Abyrzo (center) and cattleman Chad Ellingson.



► Bismarck’s Peacock Alley is modeled after the Peacock Alley in the Waldorf Astoria in New York City.



► At 40, it's all about the dry-age cooler, where diners have the opportunity to walk through the kitchen, pick out a CAB steak and watch Chef Alan prepare it for the evening.

Peacock, the young entrepreneurs and girls looking for a local night out on the town.

Then there's the ambiance thing.

"The Peacock is up-tempo," he says of the restaurant known for custom martinis, the CAB cowboy ribeye and beckoning a younger demographic.

"We brag about how old it is,"

Zimmerman laughs, "like we're so old, we're cool again."

The 40 Steak & Seafood has a different feel.

"When you walk into the 40, tension and stress should leave your body," Zimmerman

says. There are no windows. Subtle light from a fireplace in each room demands attention taken away from the outside stresses of the world.

Both serve CAB.

At Peacock, it's often to state congressmen and their staffers for the sake of a business meeting over lunch. Particular congressional hearings are aired live each week from upstairs for patrons to listen in or simply feel a part of something bigger around them. At 40, it's all about the dry-age cooler, where diners have the opportunity to walk through

the kitchen, pick out a CAB steak and watch Chef Alan prepare it for the evening.

Accolades

Not long ago, Dale and Melodie, along with Chef Dusty with camera in tow, ventured south for the annual Cattle Industry Convention and National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Trade Show to accept the National Beef Innovator of the Year Award. A first for the state of North Dakota, as well as the region, for creativity and passion in promoting and selling beef, it meant more than words on a plaque or a standing ovation.

That was 2013, and aside from a line that sometimes lingers in the foyer of the Peacock now, business is as usual. Zimmerman starts his mornings at the 40 and makes his way to the Peacock just before lunch. He'll be the one catching orders and joking with the line cooks who are now fully visible behind the grill.

"You have to knock their socks off,"

Zimmerman says — perhaps a lesson learned in his previous business life that has proven to be just as important in the new one.

"You better be knowledgeable, and know your story. People love that, and we have a great story to tell."

Next month we'll introduce you to Chad Ellingson of Saint Anthony, N.D., a distant neighbor and now friend of Zimmerman who spent a day last summer serving CAB alongside chefs Dusty and Alan.

AY

Editor's Note: Laura Conaway is producer communications specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC.



► Next month we'll introduce you to Chad Ellingson of Saint Anthony, N.D., a distant neighbor and now friend of Zimmerman who spent a day last summer serving CAB alongside chefs Dusty and Alan. Pictured are (from left) Chef Dusty Swenningson, Dale Zimmerman, Chef Alan Abryzo, and Chad Ellingson.