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Hunting, Fishing, Branding

CAB licensee is outfitting America's outdoor enthusiasts.

by Jennifer Kiko

There's an African diorama complete with elephants, zebras, lions and cape buffalo. There's a walk-through aquarium that provides habitat for catfish, large-mouth bass, yellow perch and grass carp. A three-story mountain features trophy polar bears, grizzlies, moose, elk, grouse and prairie dogs. And there's a restaurant offering *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) hamburgers, frankfurters, and Philly cheese steak and prime rib sandwiches, with notes on how to purchase the brand's steak strips from a mail-order catalog.

Where do you go to experience such a combination of sights, sounds and tastes? Cabela's — the World's Foremost Outfitter® of hunting, fishing and outdoor gear.

Cabela's is a story of kitchen-table dreams turned reality for founder Dick Cabela, who came up

with a plan to sell fishing flies in 1961. Nearly 30 years later, in January 1998, Cabela's 290,000-square-foot (sq. ft.) world headquarters building was finished in Sidney, Neb. Today, the company has 10 retail showrooms nationwide, with plans for expansion. In 2003, the company opened a 250,000-sq.-ft. retail store in Hamburg, Pa. The store averages more than 6 million annual visitors, positioning it as one of Pennsylvania's top tourist attractions.

Enticing customers to stay

Customers spend an average of four to five hours in a Cabela's store. The company realized by adding a restaurant to each location, it could extend their stay. Although conceived as a customer service, the Hamburg location's Campfire Restaurant performs beyond expectations.

Among restaurants, Cabela's is the CAB brand's largest value-added products user in the United States. The company offers 10 different CAB value-added items, and in fiscal year (FY) 2004, sales rose on every item

for a total sales increase of 17%.

Darrell Wells is the company's national retail foodservice manager. He says the decision to carry the CAB brand was the result of two events that occurred in 2003. Sysco Food Services of Detroit, a CAB-licensed distributor since 2000, hosted a demonstration and tasting event with quarter-pound frankfurters.

"When I tasted a CAB frank compared to other offerings at the cutting, it was like comparing bologna to steak," he says. "It made quite an impact on me. We began serving that frankfurter immediately."

Uisinger's Famous Sausage, based in Milwaukee, Wis., makes the CAB frankfurter that caught Wells' attention. These all-beef franks are made with natural spices and fresh garlic to add robust flavor and hearty texture. They are then slow-smoked over an open, hardwood fire for an old-fashioned flavor.

The second event to attract Cabela's to the brand was a food show sponsored by Sysco Food Services of Central Pennsylvania. Wells attended a CAB presentation and decided

the quality product and integrity of the brand fit hand in hand with Cabela's vision of quality offerings for its customers. Today, all beef items served at Cabela's restaurants carry the CAB brand.

One of the most popular menu items in eastern U.S. stores is the Philly steak sandwich. "We seem to fly through that particular item, and our guests seem genuinely grateful for the quality meat we sell," Wells says. "Our other units are selling a lot of the CAB quarter-pound frankfurters, as well as prime rib sandwiches."

Exceeding expectations

"The customer has a preconceived notion of what his or her taste buds are about to experience and then ... bam! The quality hits them and they are floored," Wells says. "Customers have come to appreciate knowing that we serve CAB product."

Using CAB items on the menu has ensured that the same quality and consistency provided through the retail stores is found in the restaurants. "It gives us a step up on the competition because we know there is no better product on the market," Wells says.

Cabela's crews are highly educated about all aspects of the products they sell. "We have a unique training program that involves

By the numbers

Cabela's served the following quantities in its Hamburg, Pa., location in its first 3½ months:

- ▶ Placed end to end, along with accompanying buns, enough CAB frankfurters to reach from the base to the summit of Mount Everest — more than 29,100 feet!
- ▶ 3 tons of *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Philly steak meat, the weight of a 9-foot-high Indian elephant.
- ▶ Stacked on top of each other horizontally, enough CAB brand burgers to reach the 10th floor of Rockefeller Center in New York City.



educating our crews on the proper preparation of the products, as well as a thorough understanding on just what it takes to be considered for the CAB program," Wells says. "Along with this training, offering a consistently superior product such as the CAB brand helps to ensure a better offering to our customers."

The addition of CAB brand menu items to the restaurants was questionable to a few customers at the start, but Wells says they seem to understand that to get a high-quality product, they have to pay a slightly higher price.

"We hear a few complaints about the price of the items on our menu from time to time, but those customers who make a

complaint have a different opinion when we approach them in the dining area," Wells says. "Once they have tasted our quality CAB products, they understand."

Wells says if he had a dime for every time he heard someone say, "It's just a hot dog!" he would be rich. He says he'd be even better off if he had a nickel for every time that same customer then tasted the frankfurter and said, "Wow!"

The Cabela's catalog, available by mail and online at www.cabelas.com, also carries the CAB steak strips made by Gary West Meats in Jacksonville, Ore., as a future favorite in America's backpacks.

