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► Victor Son (center) of Dingbats & Abate Restaurant Corp., Pittsburgh, Pa., accepted CAB's Chain Restaurant Marketer of the Year Award from Mark Polzer (left) and Jim Riemann.

Success for Dingbats

Small restaurant chain moves ahead with CAB.

by Jennifer Kiko

Customer satisfaction is the goal at Dingbats, a restaurant chain with five locations in and around Pittsburgh, Pa. Dingbats proclaims itself to be “a fun place to eat and drink” and has achieved popularity in the region by promising high-quality food, made from scratch, at affordable prices. All Dingbats beef

entrées are exclusively *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand products.

Victor Son, Dingbats' chief financial officer (CFO), says the CAB brand is key to staying competitive. “We compete with national chains and needed a point of differentiation,” Son says. “We wanted something to put us a cut above the rest. The *Certified Angus Beef* brand certainly delivers.

The impact it has had on our total sales speaks for itself?”

Dingbats was licensed in September 2003. Though the past year brought record beef prices because of a supply shortage, Dingbats attributes a 10% sales increase to the business generated from its CAB brand entrées.

Similar to the iconic “Cheers” of 1980s television fame, Dingbats has successfully carved a niche for itself in Western Pennsylvania. The restaurant attracts repeat customers by combining this high-quality Angus brand with consumer

promotions, innovative entrées, and employee training and incentives programs.

Chris Glosson, CAB national chain director, says the restaurant considered

several factors — integrity of the program, confidence level based on food and labor costs, credibility of the brand's specifications, and marketability — before making the decision to become licensed.

Working together

“Loyalty is the key to Dingbats' success,” Glosson says. “The restaurant is extremely loyal to the local community, its employees and the brand.”

Dingbats' employees have participated in waitstaff training programs to increase their knowledge of the beef they serve. The restaurant sponsors incentive programs that promote sales and benefit employees by offering bonuses to the person who sells the most CAB steaks. It's a way to market its point of differentiation both internally and externally.

“By offering training and marketing support to our licensees, we build commitment and excitement for a quality product. In turn, our customers reap higher sales and increase demand for Angus cattle,” Glosson says.

“The CAB logo and brand name is to the CAB program what profit is to our restaurant customers, as well as distributors, packers and producers. We're all affected, all the way down the chain,” Glosson says.

He adds that branding is critically important, and distributors are crucial to the process. “We work in positive ways with our distributors to attract regional chains by providing a high-quality product that is readily available. USFS-Greensburg is a great distributor and played an important role in securing Dingbats and maintaining the chain's demand for *Certified Angus Beef* brand product.”

Dingbats increased demand for CAB product through several successful promotions and by featuring premier entrées on the menu. The restaurant recently unveiled new menu items, including the Peppercorn Butcher's Steak Salad. More than 700 salads sold in the first week.

A Saturday night football, steak and beer special is a continuing success, with more than 800 sirloin steaks sold each Saturday for four consecutive weeks. Assuming a 12-ounce (oz.) serving, it would take about 30 cattle to produce that many top sirloins. Dingbats paired with Latrobe Brewing Co. of Latrobe, Pa., makers of Rolling Rock beer, to create a CAB Rolling Rock beer-marinated filet of sirloin. The entrée is a popular hit with consumers who remain loyal to this “hometown” concept that continues to build passion and desire for the brand.



► One of Dingbats' many promotions, the grill giveaway was a cross-promotion with Broil King® and Rolling Rock. It was a great draw for consumers, prompting sales of more than 800 top sirloin steaks each Saturday.

In addition to steaks and design-your-own steak burgers, Dingbats offers a steak fajita entrée and daily specials. For \$9.99, patrons can dine on the “Twenty Dollar Steak Sandwich” — filet mignon, peppers, mushrooms and provolone cheese on open-faced garlic cheese bread with potato skins, lettuce, tomato, red onion and onion rings. Dingbats’ “Steak Australia” is a marinated 10-oz. top sirloin served with mushrooms and potato skins. The restaurant also takes advantage of underutilized cuts by offering its own version of the flat iron, an entrée named “London Block.”

Aggressive marketing endeavors helped the business win the CAB Chain Restaurant Marketer of the Year Award in 2004.

Dingbats uses the brand’s campaign radio spots, table tents and banners, and has conducted live radio promotions during special events. One particular promotion, the Hot Country Jam, involved local country radio station Y108. Dingbats perfected a signature wood-smoked “CAB BBQ burger” just for the occasion.

Whether Dingbats is developing new entrées, creating entertaining promotions or rewarding its waitstaff with solid incentives, the CAB brand is top of mind. As Son says, “The product speaks for itself.”

“Our brand was tailor-made for such a



► Dingbats created a signature burger for the Hot Country Jam event, which involved a local radio station and attracted hundreds of consumers.

great service-oriented chain,” Glosson says. “Quality verified, price-justified, service- and eating experience-solidified.”

Words to live by at Dingbats — a small chain reaping big success for the CAB brand and Angus producers nationwide.

