

WHAT A CHEF WANTS:

# A DIFFERENT ROUTE TO SUCCESS



by **Laura Conaway**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Chefs defy stereotypes partly because it's their job — not just to think outside of it, but to reinvent the box. They might fan that spark through formal training or not, but each of them represents a new flavor in the universe of taste.

Cindy Hutson won't claim to be entirely self-taught, but, like most great chefs, she started early and owes a lot to family and friends. She infused the styles and flavors of

her life, and even though she's a high-profile chef now, she keeps learning.

Growing up in small-town New Jersey and visiting a friend's Portuguese restaurant in New York, Hutson developed a fascination with different foods by the age of 9. She watched cooking shows on TV, and her family encouraged her to explore the kitchen. Somebody had to get some good out of it.

"Mom hated cooking, but I loved to eat," she says. Seafood was one of the first fascinations.

## Love of the islands

Often fishing with her father in the Atlantic, she felt the call and spent nearly a decade in commercial fishing, culminating in a captain's license and operating a charter boat from Miami to Bimini by the 1980s.

"I would sell the catch of the day off the docks, but there was always enough left for me to cook," Hutson says, "so I cooked all the fresh ingredients in every new way and became very proficient at it."

As the westernmost island of The Bahamas, Bimini was a gateway that called her farther out to sea to a rich culinary world fed by centuries of European fusion with island traditions. Hutson met Norma Shirley, "the Julia Child of Jamaica," and her son Delius Shirley, who would become a partner in life, business and cooking.



Beef was an important feature on fine-dining menus, and part of Hutson's emerging style that blended French provincial with local island flavors in "The Cuisine of the Sun."

The two brought that style to the Miami area in the 1990s and soon rose to the five-star level. Somewhere in the passion for cooking and kitchen camaraderie, Hutson had become a chef. She didn't start out with full confidence, however.

## Gaining confidence

"I thought Norma was going to be our chef, but Delius said I should write the menu," she recalls. "It was 17 hours a day, seven days a week and I worried and cried until the first reviews came out. I didn't know if this was working."

Was it ever. Critical acclaim and accolades, as well as positive feedback from customers, soon provided the confidence.

"After all the burns, the cuts — maybe I would have walked away had the reviews



► At Cayman Cookout, Chef Cindy Hutson whips up a batch of ribeye tacos for hors d'oeuvres at the Caribbean gathering of famous chefs and wine experts.

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been bad, but the hard work paid off,” Hutson says.

Their signature Ortanique on the Mile, like its creator, exudes warmth, captivating patrons’ senses with deep colors of sunset yellow and sienna, coupled with rich mahogany and the smell of fresh steaks on the grill.

“Cooking is all about making people happy,” Hutson says with ease. “I just like the gathering part, the social part, really the warmth of a table.”

For the past two decades her guests have echoed that sentiment. From Las Vegas to Washington, D.C., the dynamic pair have opened establishments that once brought personal success and later provided it to those just getting their footing in the culinary world.

Today Hutson’s primary focus includes a second Ortanique (on the Crescent) in Grand Cayman, and The Dunmore in The Bahamas. If ever she has a moment to catch her breath and let it all soak in, she doesn’t. Instead, Hutson gives. She teaches. She leads.

In 2012, amid culinary classes, chef training and consulting, the pioneer prepared an exquisite meal of *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand short ribs at the renowned James Beard House in New York City, a step toward greater partnering with CAB.

### Going to the source

An avid learner and adventurer at heart, Hutson wasn’t content with simply serving what she says is “the best meat I can find.” She wanted to know more, to grow. So, on her list of exotic travel locations she added Big Sky Country.



► Chef Cindy participates in a hands-on butchery session at the CAB Education & Culinary Center, experimenting with new cuts of beef like the Vegas Strip.

Trekking through the mountains and valleys of Montana, she met some of the Angus ranchers that afford her the opportunity to serve quality to her guests.

“I think it’s important to have a story behind what you sell and what you prepare for people. Because a lot of times they can’t experience it. They don’t have the ability to meet the rancher,” Hutson says. “You can hear about it, and you can read about what they do and the care they take, the turmoil and success, but to actually come out here and experience the ranchers’ life, it brings it home, it makes it into a bigger family. I have a story to tell, and it’s an American story, and it’s great.”



**Editor’s Note:** *Laura Conaway is public relations and industry information specialist for CAB.*



► Taking part in a Chefs Panel, Hutson discusses observations and shares anticipated future trends for the restaurant industry.