



Hospitality Made Right

Two dining establishments in Virginia serve CHB with their hospitality.

by Julie White



Sister restaurants Vintage Tavern (left) and River Stone Chophouse (right) feature CHB on their menu.

Upscale dining with a twist of Southern hospitality is what sister restaurants Vintage Tavern and River Stone Chophouse, Suffolk, Va., bring to the plate; and on the menu is Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) with a unique flavor.

“Our goal in opening the restaurants was to carry on the tradition of Southern hospitality,” says Sam McGann, executive chef. He owns the restaurants with his wife, Cindy, and partners Brian and Teresa Mullins. “We think of it as a way of life: a lifestyle, if you will, in the importance of social graces.”

First to open in 2006 was Vintage Tavern in the bedroom community in southeast Virginia. River Stone Chophouse was opened in 2008 in a location just 15 minutes away. The establishments are distinct in design and atmosphere, but both carry out the genuine sense of treating guests like family.

Serving seasonal Southern cuisine, Vintage Tavern is driven by its community in Governor’s Point. Welcoming guests to the 150-seat restaurant is a 40-seat bar and outdoor covered dining on the front patio, and out back is a waterfall, fire pit and fishpond.

“We work with local farmers, fishers and foragers to bring the restaurant as much local product as we possibly can,” McGann says. He realizes that sourcing close to home is important to the restaurant industry.

“We are all concerned about our carbon footprint and being conscious of our environment,” he says. They grow their own herbs, grind their own grits and make their own breads in-house. They also make their own sausages and cured meats. “There is that strong movement of farm to table right now,” McGann says.

River Stone Chophouse is a classic chophouse, serving steak and seafood. Located in a new business district, the restaurant is driven by the nearby businesses. It holds four distinct dining rooms and private rooms on the second floor for private events. The design was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright’s creations, and each private room is named in honor of him.

“With the steak and seafood concept in mind,” McGann says, “that’s where we look long and hard at the opportunity to work with Hereford beef.”

Hereford tenderloin was used from the beginning, and McGann was impressed with the flavor, consistency and age-ability. “It won the taste test and completely surprised me,” he says.

McGann went to their supplier, Sysco Hampton Roads, and asked the company to look into Hereford beef. Consequently, they brought CHB on board.

“The product performs on a very consistent basis, which is very important to our customers who menu it,” says Stephen Tracy, brand manager for Sysco Hampton Roads.

McGann says the choice was made by their guests’ admiration of CHB. “We’ve had an overwhelming response from our customers at both restaurants for an extended period of time now,” he says. “They have come to accept CHB and enjoy its flavor. The best answer comes from our guests.”

As a business owner, McGann finds tremendous value for the dollar in using CHB. “With the economy the way it is, we need to look at the price point as hard as we possibly can,” he says. “CHB has been able to help us prove that value and keep the customer happy at the same time. It’s a win-win situation for all of us.”

River Stone Chophouse focuses on and serves traditional steakhouse cuts prepared in a unique way. A signature found on the menu is the 22-ounce (oz.) bone-in ribeye that has been dry aged between 21 and 28 days. “From what we understand, and from talking to some of the reps, we may be one of the first and only restaurants to dry age Hereford products,” McGann says.

The bone-in 18-oz. Kansas City strip steak is first cold smoked as the whole strip loin before it is cut, grilled and served. “It has a natural applewood smoked aroma once it comes off the grill,” McGann says. Also offered is a 24-oz. bone-in porterhouse, an 8-oz. tenderloin for ala carte dining and a 12-oz. sirloin au poivre. The primary steak at Vintage Tavern is the tenderloin.

McGann is pleased with how CHB products perform, but he also

supports what CHB stands for. “We believe in the way the calf is matured and raised,” McGann says. “There is a conscious effort to have it grazed as long as possible and still has wonderful flavor and is free-range fed as long as possible.”

McGann compares CHB to other branded products and appreciates that the breed is pure. “Angus is so popular, but I think it is confusing now,” he says. “At one time I think it had a lot more meaning that what it does today. I like to think that CHB will learn from that as they start moving forward.”

He hopes that Vintage Tavern and River Stone Chophouse will help make a name for the product and encourage other restaurants to serve CHB. “I’m proud to say we have found a great niche for it in our concept, and I hope that it will springboard other operations to try it; we are kind of laying the ground work.”

McGann looks forward to the relationship between CHB and his restaurants to expand. For now, he’ll continue to serve the product that has proved valuable to him and stick to the type of service he knows best. “It’s a comfortable sense of caring for your guest and really meaning it. In our case, we like to say hospitality is our life.” **HW**