

CHB[®] To Go



Pictured in front of the Steakhouse Express counter are (l to r) Russell (son), Tommy (father), Emilee (daughter) and Haylee (daughter) Walters.

Kentucky restaurant owner uses Hereford beef in unique delivery business.

by Teresa Oe

Tommy Walters was raised in a place where food wasn't merely sustenance and families didn't just eat and run. They actually tasted and appreciated each delicious, prepared-with-love Cajun dish.

Tommy's surroundings are different now than when he was a child growing up in Lafayette, La. As a restaurateur, he is faced with the challenges of providing more for less, and in a hurry. Consumers

still demand quality, but at the same time, meals must accommodate busy schedules and tight budgets.

With Certified Hereford Beef[®] (CHB[®]), Tommy has found a way to "deliver" on the convenience, value and quality that consumers demand. His Steakhouse Express restaurant in Nicholasville, Ky., serves CHB right to the customer's door. That's right. Residents of Jessamine County can enjoy a tasty Hereford steak with all the fixings in the comfort of their homes without the hassle of preparation. It sounds genius, smells like steak and feels like love. Tommy's love — love for great food — defines his business.

Where it all began

Tommy learned to cook at an early age from his father, Roland, who was a noted Cajun chef. A partner in Don's Seafood and Steakhouse, which later became Joe's Crab Shack, Roland was an expert on food and the food business.

Both Tommy and his brother, Kevin, grew up in the kitchen alongside their father, cooking delicious southwest Louisiana cuisine. When the boys were grown, they utilized their talents to bring Louisiana to Kentucky in the form of Furlongs, a full-service restaurant known for its "food with character."

Tommy and Kevin opened Furlongs in Lexington in 1992, and in '98 opened another in Louisville, which won one of the city's Best New Restaurant awards.

Entrees at Furlongs include several varieties of blackened fresh fish, soft-shell crab, gumbo and the house specialty, mignon ecrivresse, a 9-ounce fillet topped with crawfish etouffee.

In 2005 the Walters brothers diversified their restaurant experience, starting the delivery-based Steakhouse Express.

Why delivery, why CHB

The decision to go delivery was based on ease of operation. A smaller delivery-based shop requires less overhead: no waiters, little inventory and less licensing burdens.

Nevertheless, delivering steak is no small feat, and few have mastered this type of business. To determine whether it was a feasible idea, Tommy and Kevin studied the strategies of Steak-Out Char-Broiled Delivery[®], "the original steak delivery." Noting their success,

Tommy and Kevin dove right in, plotting the location in Nicholasville and the tasty menu in which CHB was a natural choice.

The Walters' appreciation for CHB came about before the creation of Steakhouse Express. Tommy's first CHB was a T-bone steak he bought at a Louisville farmer's market in 2004. He called Kevin the night he ate the steak and said, "We've got to change our beef (at Furlongs) tomorrow." Tommy then began corresponding with the CHB LLC folks to prepare for the switch. Soon the beef on Furlongs' menu was CHB only.

"I've tasted every breed of beef you can buy in North America," Tommy says. "Hereford is the best you can get." Accordingly, when Tommy and Kevin opened the Steakhouse Express early this year, several CHB entrees dotted the menu.

"We're excited to get the breed and brand name out in Kentucky," says Doug Miller, CHB LLC vice president of sales. "The delivery business is a great option to show the quality of our product in a unique way that accommodates consumers' lifestyles."

The details

Among the CHB delivery options are sirloin, ribeye, New York strip and T-bone steaks, as well as beef tips and hamburger steak, served with a salad, baked potato and dinner roll. One Steakhouse Express special is a 10-ounce CHB sirloin, covered in the customer's choice of garlic sauce, wild mushroom sauce or crawfish etouffee for \$15.99. Rounding off the CHB menu are a burger, steak sandwich, beef tip salad and beef vegetable soup.

Something for everyone it seems, with a variety of dishes and prices ranging from \$3.25 for a kid's meal to \$16.99 for a 16-ounce T-bone steak entree. Of course, there's the option to spice up most any meal with a little Cajun finesse. Two non-beef dishes are the New Orleans style BBQ shrimp and stuffed catfish.

Helping Tommy prepare meals and deliver them to customers are his three children: Russell, 24; Emilee, 20; and

Haylee, 16. Kevin worked side by side with the family until his unexpected death in February. "They (Tommy and Kevin) learned everything they know from Grandpa," Russell says. "And I've learned what I know from Dad. It's really three generations of chefs."

Three additional staff members assist the family regularly and others as needed at the caterings that have become a big part of Steakhouse Express business. Tommy says that horse sales and polo association events make for the restaurant's largest and most frequent catering jobs.

The restaurant is open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday and until 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Customers can expect their meals in 45 minutes to an hour if they choose delivery, or they can pick up their food at the drive-thru window. Most deliveries are within a 10-mile radius of the restaurant.

Inside Steakhouse Express, a few tables welcome customers who have time to sit and enjoy a cold beverage while waiting for their hot meals. Hereford posters decorate the walls and the front counter features a steakhouse banner with the CHB logo on each end. The logo is also found in multiple places on the steakhouse menu board to the right of the counter, as each CHB entry is distinctly marked with the imagery that represents the brand.

Another menu was posted just this fall. In August, Tommy announced a restaurant within Steakhouse Express. The kitchen is the same and the employees are too, but the menu is different. T-Boys Cajun Shop offers an all-Cajun menu that allows customers to further enjoy the work of a Louisiana-grown chef. CHB is again a part of the menu, in the form of a "Po-Boy" roast beef sandwich.

What the future holds

Steakhouse Express and its counterpart are now exclusive to the Nicholasville area, but Tommy doesn't plan to keep it this way long. "I will open a new restaurant toward the end of the year in Lexington," he says. If projections come true, several Steakhouse Express franchises will be opened in central Kentucky in the future.

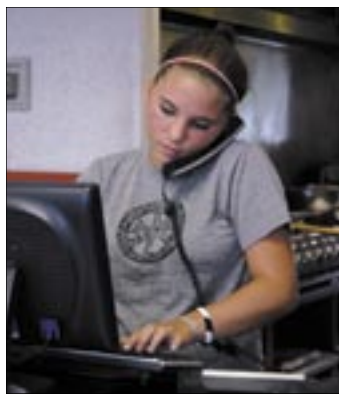
In these restaurants, Tommy wants to add meat counters, so that he can satisfy his customers' cooked and fresh meat needs.

Also in the plans is an online ordering system. Customers would be able to complete an order and pay for it online if they so desired. The restaurant's Web site is already up and running at www.steakhouseexpress.net.

While these modifications will certainly grow business, the philosophy behind the food will always be most important to the restaurant's success. "You've got to give it some love," Tommy says. "Eating isn't just something you do every day. It's a way of life." ■■



Russell gets ready to package a CHB[®] steak for delivery to a local residence. Ribeye steak and beef tips are Steakhouse Express' most-ordered entrees.



From start to finish, Tommy's children play an integral role in the day-to-day operations of the business.

