

Perfect Palate

Serving up culinary excellence and Certified Hereford Beef® in Franklin County, Tennessee.

by *Sydnee Shive*

Nestled in the downtown square of Winchester, Tenn., Filo's Tavern is more than just a place to enjoy a phenomenal meal — it's a brick-and-mortar testament to Jim Filaroski's years of culinary expertise, his pursuit of greatness and his passion for creating a phenomenal guest experience.

Filaroski owns and operates Filo's with his wife, Heather. Since the restaurant's opening in 2022, Filo's has featured Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) in its top-cut guest experience — aligning with its mission to pair high-quality, consistent food with first-class service.

“As a young lad, my dad gave me a few bits of advice. If you want to be good, stay in the middle where everybody else is, if you want to be great, do a little extra,” Filaroski says. “That's the mentality I've used my whole career — work a little harder and provide an outstanding experience.”

A natural gift

Some people are born for their professions. Whether it's destiny, a calling or the work of a higher power — Filaroski was meant to be a cook and restaurateur. Born in Portland, Maine, he took to creating elegant meals early.

“I grew up in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and when we were over there, we had a chef that cooked for us every day in our kitchen. So, every night I'd sneak down and see what she was doing, and then I spent more and more time with her,” Filaroski says. “I got an addiction at a young age.”

This love for cooking only continued to grow. As a child and teenager, Filaroski traveled the world with his family, deepening his interest in cuisine as he sampled food from different cooks, cultures and parts of the globe. He spent his summers in Laconia, N.H., near Lake Winnepesaukee, working in his grandfather's grocery store and restaurant for 25 cents a day.

“When I turned 14, I decided that instead of working for a quarter a day, I was going to work for this list of American candy. I worked all summer, and then I brought the candy home (to Malaysia) and sold it to the kids that weren't

able to come back to the U.S. I netted 500% more selling candy than making a quarter a day. That's how I lived all year — on that money.”

With natural business acumen and a passion for food, Filaroski moved back to Portland when he was 16, where he worked for a chef until he was 19. The chef prompted him to go to culinary school. Filaroski ended up graduating from the Culinary Institute of America and then went to work at Disney.

“I chose Disney because I wanted to learn their standards and how a well-run company is operated,” Filaroski says. “You go to a Disney property, and it's always meticulous. The buildings are always perfect. Everything's great. I wanted to learn at a young age. My dad said, ‘Son, if you surround yourself with great people, great things happen.’ I wanted to learn under the best, and so Disney was it.”

While at Disney, Filaroski was asked to join Houston's in Atlanta, Ga., where he continued to grow his love for doing things well and learned how to become a businessman. He eventually joined a restaurant group in Nashville, Tenn., and helped found J. Alexander's — a venture that grew to a collection of 58 restaurants over Filaroski's 30 years with the group.



Heather and Jim Filaroski

Filo's is born

When one shareholder bought J. Alexander's outright, Filaroski's life changed in the blink of an eye. Without a job and with little desire to join another corporate restaurant group, Filo's was founded.

"It was surreal. I knew everybody by names. I knew their children's name. I knew what baseball team they liked. And it was a very personal build. We did it very slowly and meticulously," Filaroski says. "And when it went away, I was like, 'What next?' I couldn't even wrap my head around it because it took us 30 years to build 58 restaurants. And hence the birth of Filo's Tavern."

Winchester is a city full of history. The building that houses Filo's Tavern — a former barbecue restaurant — was built in 1875. The Filaroskis created their restaurant space with words like 'inviting, open and friendly' at top of mind. From its soft colors and solid maple floors to arched windows, it feels modern while maintaining its historic charm.

The menu at Filo's receives constant tweaks and improvements. It features local food and fusions from Filaroski's world travels. It includes the best ingredients available, like tuna from Hawaii, salmon from Scotland and *Certified Hereford Beef*. The meals are high-quality and easy for the Filo's team to execute consistently.

"The easy part to me is to get something unique every day and go, what am I going to do with this?" he says. "What is the world missing?"

Filo's is a culmination of years of hard work and dedication to combining fantastic food with even better service. No detail went unnoticed, from the restaurant's interior design to its menu.

"I think this is a true testament to showcasing all of your skills, when you truly go out and do it for yourself," Filaroski says. "And that was the last feather I wanted to put in my cap, to say this was 100% ours. That's why we did Filo's Tavern."

Filo's runs on a simple philosophy Filaroski calls the "three-legged barstool" — quality food, value and service.

"If you're in the restaurant business, you should serve outstanding, quality, consistent food at the best possible value. If you have a professional building and beautiful ambiance, you should also give somebody \$100 worth of service at a \$25 check average. That's how I became successful.

"And living up to those standards, not just talking about it, but coming in every day and making that happen," Filaroski says. "That's what I believe in. Outstanding food at the best value."

Coming home to Hereford

"I never wanted to give a dish or an item to a guest that I personally wasn't self-fulfilled with, that didn't make me go, 'Wow,'" Filaroski says.



Certified Hereford Beef is a mainstay on the menu at Filo's Tavern.

With a lifetime of enjoying and creating meals and years of kitchen and restaurant experience, Filaroski has a palate for perfection. After more than three decades of serving another premium branded beef product at J. Alexander's, he says the quality, flavor and consistency eroded over time. Frustrated, he went on the hunt for better beef.

"I found a lot of other things out there. But I kept going back to this Hereford beef," he says. "The loins were smaller. They were more consistent. I could get blocky steaks. The quality of the beef is phenomenal."

As the beef industry has selected for ribeye size over time, steaks have gotten bigger. This also means steaks are cut thinner. Guests eat with their eyes, and they want a thick, blocky steak. *Certified Hereford Beef's* consistent flavor and ideal sizing made it the best fit for Filo's.

"I did get some feedback in the beginning. Like, 'Why would you go from a black-hided animal to a red-hided animal? Black hides are worth the quality,'" he says. "And I'm like, 'Well, I disagree with you.' So, we started out with Hereford. And suddenly, our steak sales were just booming. You know, 'Best filet I've ever eaten in my life.' And that's why we do this."

Filaroski only wants what's best for his guests. Best service, best price and best beef. The outstanding and consistent quality of *Certified Hereford Beef* fits into his three-legged barstool philosophy.

"Quality wins every argument — point blank, period," he says. "So, if it doesn't get past my palate, it isn't getting to the dining room. And that's really the simplicity of it."

Quality, consistency and service that goes above and beyond is a hallmark of Filo's. It's a hallmark of Filaroski's career, too. Guests and employees are proud that Filo's Tavern calls their Tennessee town home.

"That's my business strategy, to give guests the highest quality for the best possible price," Filaroski says. "That's been how I built Houston's, J. Alexander's and this. When you build a restaurant, it's been open for 38 years and it's doing more sales 38 years down the road than it did day one, you're doing something right. That's what we try to do." **HW**