



The 7,000-square-foot restaurant adjacent to McCook's golf course is a favorite of locals, hunters, businessmen, golfers and some who drive hundreds of miles for a special meal.



Premium Circle

From pen rider to master of white tablecloths.

by **KATY KEMP,**
Certified Angus Beef LLC

The great steak houses are in big coastal cities or peppered across the metropolitan midlands — maybe in Denver or Omaha, but certainly not McCook, Neb. Right?

Don't be so sure. Coppermill Steakhouse has a reputation for fine dining and great steak right where the beef originates.

"This is meat and potato country," says chef Ryan Fuller. "People love their steaks here."

They say when cattlemen prefer your steak house to their home kitchens, you must be doing something right. The Coppermill must be doing more than that. The 7,000-square-foot restaurant adjacent to McCook's golf course is a favorite of locals, hunters, businessmen, golfers and some who drive hundreds of miles for a special meal.

Owner Adam Siegfried says his role in the beef industry has come full circle. His dad, Cal Siegfried, helped start Heartland Cattle Co. with Patsy Houghton back when Adam was in grade school. At the heifer-development feedlot near McCook, as an 8-year-old he remembers doing everything from washing water troughs to "whacking weeds" and being promoted to pen rider as a teenager.

"It was interesting to grow up around

Heartland, to see the genetics and how [we helped] shape people's herds for the benefit of the producer," says Siegfried. A major customer there was Connealy Angus, Whitman, Neb., where he later learned about the genetic keys to quality.

However, there was something else already marinating in his mind. He always loved cattle and beef, so he began working part time at the Coppermill, learning from then-owner Kevin Ord by the time he was 16.

Learning the restaurant

"In high school, I was on the meats-judging team, went to state a few times, and judged livestock, as well," Siegfried recalls. Between those activities and cowboying, he still worked at the steak house. "I did everything from head cook on Mondays to bartending to ... host."

Then he took a job with Connealy until other interests intervened. For seven years he worked as a hunting guide for Ringneck Ranch in Kansas and Eagle Charters in Alaska, still occasionally

working at the Coppermill during a slow time.

Then one day in 2009, Ord called with an offer to formalize the relationship and look into the future.

"He wanted to know if I would be interested in coming back to McCook. My father, who was Kevin's great friend, thought I was getting tired of six months here, six months there between Alaska and Kansas."

Maybe he was. At any rate, he decided to try it for a year.

"I was kind of Kevin's main manager and ran the whole place," he says. "I liked it and ended up buying into the Coppermill in 2010." Since then he bought another restaurant and is in the process of opening a third.

True to quality

Siegfried never forgot the lessons learned from Ord, however. Every steak is aged and hand-cut in-house.

Although he apprenticed his way into the restaurant business, he credits Houghton's mentorship and time spent with live cattle for his understanding and strict stance on aging the steaks at least 30 days.

"We usually put 30 to 60 days of wet age on everything except tenderloins, so that's 60 days on the ribeyes and strips," says Siegfried. "You know it breaks them down, gives them a more robust beef flavor and, of course, a more tender product."

To offer the longer-aged steaks, Coppermill stocks inventory well in advance of daily demand. Keeping enough *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand on hand to allow for that aging is a cost challenge, but worth it as part of a premium dining experience.

(Continued on page 100)



"This is meat and potato country," says chef Ryan Fuller. "People love their steaks here."

PHOTOS BY MIRANDA REIMAN

Premium Circle *(from page 98)*

Siegfried is proud to offer “extra-premium” items, too, like the bone-in ribeye that ages almost 100 days.

“The experience of that wet-age, I mean the flavor is incredible. The texture of the meat is amazing. It just kind of falls apart. You don’t really need a steak knife to cut it,” he says.

Occasionally, he special-orders some

dry-aged primals that command at least \$65 on the menu.

“They’d be \$100 in a big city,” Siegfried notes.

Those specialty items aside, the regular menu holds its own. Coppermill offers several cuts, and all the beef sold is CAB, including 200 pounds (lb.) per week of prime rib slow-cooked in an alto-shaam

that maintains it to perfection for each order.

Regardless of the cut ordered, Siegfried and Fuller are confident in the quality.

“It’s just such a good, consistent product, with the baselines that [CAB] hits for marbling and size of ribeye,” says Siegfried.

The latter has been a growing problem



“It’s just such a good, consistent product, with the baselines that [CAB] hits for marbling and size of ribeye,” says Adam Siegfried.



for restaurants not buying product with a ribeye specification. Variation there forces many to vary thickness when cutting and time while cooking, resulting in varied eating quality.

“We don’t have to worry that one steak’s going to be different from the other; it’s always the same thing, and that’s a big deal in our industry,” says Fuller, a McCook native who worked his way home after culinary school and seven years in Texas restaurants.

Service a priority

Great food might earn some repeat customers, but Siegfried says the service side is just as important. He works to combine the CAB-brand quality advantage with a fine-dining experience “from presentation to the mouth.”

“We try to give people the best product we can possibly put on the plate,” he says, “but we also give our waitresses the whole aspect” so that waitstaff can interact and answer questions confidently.

“If you’re not getting the whole dining experience from the quality of the meat to the quality of the service to the atmosphere, you’re missing out,” Siegfried says.

With the way beef prices have risen, “People might not be coming back if you’re not giving them the full experience,” he adds. “When you come here, whether it’s December or July, it’s always going to be the same service, the same great food, it’s the same consistent product across the board.”

The Coppermill is miles from the bright lights of New York or L.A., but with a commitment to quality learned long ago, it’s earning its own reputation in cow country.

“Our economy is definitely ag-based, so corn prices, cow prices all come in trends and all trickle down to McCook,” Siegfried says. “But good, hard-working people are always hungry for a good steak and a good experience.”