Dedication to Tradition, Exceeding Guests' Expectations Make Connor Concepts Successful

By Liisa Sullivan

Connor Concepts has "steaked" its claim on creating casual, yet upscale steakhouse dining experiences for its guests throughout the state of Tennessee and, most recently, Ohio and Kentucky.

Based in Knoxville, Connor Concepts, Inc. currently owns and operates 10 Chop House restaurants located in Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio as well as two Connors Steak and Seafood in Tennessee. The company is also the majority owner of Regas, Tennessee's oldest restaurant. Their recipe for success is an unrelenting commitment to superior dining experiences.

Connor Concepts, founded in 1992, has designed various dining concepts to cater to a diverse clientele. Each concept offers a distinctive dining experience based on old-fashioned food with original flair.

Chop House restaurants maintain a heavy emphasis on beef; they specialize in heavily-aged steaks and chops using only the freshest ingredients and premium cuts of beef. Currently, all beef comes from Halperns' Purveyors in Atlanta.

Chop House favorites are USDA premium steaks that are hand selected, grain fed, heavily aged, and uniquely seasoned. They include prime rib, rib eyes, sirloins, New York Strips, T-bones and more. The prime steak selection is the USDA's highest grade of beef and only two percent of beef earns this designation — it is strictly for beef connoisseurs.

Other popular entrees include a 14-ounce pork chop, 12-ounce lamb chops and a wide selection of pastas, ribs, chicken and seafood. Starters tempt with choices such as

Knoxville, Tennessee-based Connor Concepts has perfected dining concepts that appeal to a variety of consumer palates. The Chop House (above) focuses on premium aged steaks and chops, while Connors Steak and Seafood (below) offers a wider selection of seafood, appetizers and desserts. A focus on high-quality ingredients and traditional preparation methods has made both concepts successful.

pizza Florentine, scallops Rockefeller, and sweet corn tamale cakes. The colossal homemade onion rings and the "Big Orange Potato" are favorite satisfying sides.

Connors Steak and Seafood restaurants have a greater emphasis on other items such as seafood, appetizers and desserts. The appetizer and dessert offerings are a little more diverse and the portions are somewhat larger. Desserts include sweet selections such as strawberry shortcake, caramel fudge cheesecake and bananas foster; ice cream is homemade.

Regas differs from the Chop House and Connors Steak and Seafood in that it offers fine dining; this Knoxville landmark has been in existence since 1918. It is the city's most award-winning restaurant; in 2001, Connor Concepts partnered with them to continue the tradition of preparing American cuisine at its best.

All three concepts also offer quality spirits and wines from around the world. The team at Connor Concepts believes that a quality cocktail is as

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important as the quality ingredients that go into their recipes.

Mike Connor, president and CEO of Connor Concepts, began his illustrious restaurant career with Steak and Ale in Knoxville after graduating from the University of Tennessee. He worked with them for a short stint before joining list at Connor Concepts, but they do not wish to move ahead too quickly.

"Slow and steady growth is good," Connor said. "We plan to open one more Chop House and an additional Connors Steak and Seafood by the end of 2007. Connors Steak and Seafood will actually be renamed to simply 'Connors Seafood.' We are trying a little bit of a new concept there."

The company has come up with a formula that

Fresh ingredients, attentive service and an eye for detail are secrets to the success of the family of Connors Concepts restaurants. Signature dishes include pan-seared Ahi tuna, topped with sesame seeds and served with pickled ginger, wasabi cream and orange-ginger sauce.

the Regas family to create Grady's restaurant chain. Over the next seven years, Connor served as president of Grady's and opened several more restaurants before it limits their development to a 300-mile radius from the corporate base. They do not currently have any franchise opportunities — all restaurants are operated by

The Chop House, with 10 locations in Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio, is dedicated to providing guests with a memorable dining experience. The concept combines a casual atmosphere with a top quality, made-from-scratch menu.

merged with Chili's. Connor continued to consult and then went on to join forces with a team of restaurateurs to form Connor Concepts in 1992.

Connor explains that the corporate culture at Connor Concepts is the key to the company's success.

"The majority of our management staff has been 'grown' within the company," Connor said. "They hold the company's foundational beliefs to heart and put them to use in the various restaurants that we own. These beliefs reflect our commitment to exceeding our guests' expectations, time and time again."

Providing growth and prosperity for its team members is also high on the the corporation and their in-house team of experts.

Connor Concepts remembers and recaptures the "good old days," when food preparation and service knew no shortcuts and when fresh, natural ingredients were used in consistently preparing the highest-quality food. The company is committed to creating and preserving casual dining that exemplifies these old principles in a fresh and happening way.

"Ultimately," Connor said, "we want our guests to return because they had fun. Of course, our foundational beliefs are at that core, but creating an atmosphere and menu where people want to return to have a good time is what we are all about."

Connor Concepts, Inc.
10 Keys to Restaurant Success

- Integrity
- Uncompromising Standards
- Product
- Service
- Consistency
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Creativity
- Perspective
- Environment