

Dining Review

By Peter Tyner

Archer's Butcher Block Meat Market & Delicatessen

Archer's Aims Higher

"Bringin' home the bacon" has new meaning thanks to the advent of Archer's Butcher Block in Placerville. Fresh pork bellies sliced thick and smoke-cured to perfection is rumored to be the main reason for the shop's sky high repeat customer rate. But it isn't just bacon they crave, it's nearly every meat product you can name.

This month the meat retailer celebrates its fifth anniversary. The back story of this popular enterprise is one of creativity and persistence.

In 1999 Georgia and Gary Grover took over the operations of Archers Custom Meat Cutting, and Archers Ranch Butchering, a Georgetown-based mobile slaughter and meat cutting service started by Georgia's parents Max and Gail Archer several years earlier. It was a logical progression of owner-operator, as Georgia's family has been in the meat processing business for three generations.

The Grovers recognized a growing preference for natural beef particularly among younger Americans. As mass media revealed more details about "factory farm" meat production, they realized that the company's widely respected reputation in meat services put them in a unique position to bring certified natural meat products to consumers.

"Natural" is a term not to be confused with "organic." Both labels are issued by US Department of Agriculture. Natural beef cannot contain any artificial flavors or flavorings, coloring ingredients, chemical preservatives, or other artificial or synthetic ingredients. Natural products must not be more than "minimally processed," and not be exposed to antibiotics or growth-enhancing hormones. Additionally natural beef must finish in pastures rather than feedlots. Industry experts estimate that 375,000 to 425,000 head of cattle in the United States are produced under a natural product regime.

Retailing natural cuts of meat was an appealing idea, but it became clear that the addition of a meat store and delicatessen would require relocating from remote Georgetown. The team began a search for new digs and in 2010 found a suitable facility in Placerville on Mother Lode Drive. They were confident the family's butchering, cutting and retail meat market could fit under one roof without overlap.

Archer's Butcher Block and Delicatessen opened in November 2010 featuring natural Angus beef, pork, poultry and other livestock, all certified by the USDA to contain no added hormones, steroids or antibiotics.

All the natural meats are purchased in bulk from established vendors, and cut to order right there in the store. That includes the wildly popular bacon. And the deli side of the house prospered making and serving mega-meat sandwiches. People responded overwhelmingly, voting the enterprise "Best Meat Market" three years in a row.

Archer's Butcher Block packages their natural meats in any combination and size from individual portions up through "value packs," custom packages designed to suit a family's ongoing needs.

All meat cuts are always cold and absolutely fresh, never processed in conjunction with the Custom Cutting

division of the company which has its own cold storage, cutting rooms and processing tools in a separate wing.

A tour of the place reveals a beehive of activity. A dozen employees are divided between the Butcher Block Meat retailing, and the original ranch/farm services division of the company. Workers assigned to one meat processing unit do not assist in another.

Heavy trays of freshly ground beef shuttle endlessly from the cold processing room into the display cases and just as quickly go out the door in multi pound packages. Glass refrigerators showcase thick marbled steaks, super-sized roasts, pink pork chops, mountains of bacon, tender lamb chops and intriguing cuts of buffalo which tantalize lines of meat-hungry customers. Other cases display fresh turkey, chicken and duck. The Butcher Block carries other specialty meats such as Pheasant, Elk, Venison, and Rabbit. If you prefer alligator or other exotic meats, just ask.

Smoked turkeys are huge sellers at Thanksgiving, but the king of all meat products during the holidays is prime rib, followed by smoked hams. After five years Georgia knows what to expect from her fans. "We always have to reorder, so we advise our customers to reserve theirs early as possible."

Curing meat is a house specialty. "We specialize in smoked products from our own smokehouse!" enthused Georgia. "We make our own salami, jerky, ham, bacon, pastrami, corned beef, smoked pork chops, smoked spare ribs, smoked chicken and smoked turkey all on site!"

Gary Grover visits ranches and farms three days a week with the mobile Ranch



Georgia packaging fresh, natural ground beef.

Butchering vehicle, and spends the rest of his time cutting the meat for return to the client ranches.

It was Georgia's Dad, Max Archer, that took Gary under his wing and trained him in the field. Gary is not just a slaughter man, nor just a meat cutter, he is considered to be an "old time butcher", the one who can do it all. His recipes for cured meats have earned Archer's Ranch Butchering and Archer's Custom Meat Cutting an excellent reputation in the meat business.

As for Archer's Butcher Block and Delicatessen, Georgia reigns at the top of her game. The family tradition is intact and flourishing with herself and husband Gary at the wheel. And with two kids at home, the next generation of owner/operators may already be a farm club.

One tours the whole facility and comes away with the conclusion that this is a friendly but disciplined enterprise with tight controls and knowledgeable employees. Georgia agrees. "And we are so happy to be



Natural, custom smoked holiday hams from Archer's own smokehouse



Archer's carries a large selection of natural and hard to find meats.

here, it's so convenient for our customers. We're growing like crazy. At least 20 new people find us every day and they come back again and again. We're grateful for the popularity, but," she emphasized, "quality control remains our first and last priority."

Archer's Butcher Block is located at 5425 Mother Lode Drive in Placerville. The meat market and deli is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information call, 530-626-MEAT