



## Facilitator — October/November 2011



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### LONE STAR STEAK HOUSE

Sherleen Mahoney

#### TEXAS LAND & CATTLE STEAK HOUSE

Reputation is at Steak

Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle shifts its culture to focus on people first

For authentic Texas steak, chicken, ribs and seafood, high-tail it to Lone Star Steakhouse or Texas Land & Cattle. Famous for their hand-cut, wood-fire steaks, these steak houses offer a unique Texas experience with Texas-sized portions, country music and Texas artifacts.

Today, 107 Lone Star Steakhouses and 26 Texas Land & Cattle restaurants are in operation.

#### Lesson Learned

As master chefs know, wood-fire grilling adds a wonderful smoky aroma, enhances natural flavors and is the ideal way to cook steak and fish. But to ensure the continuous delivery of delicious dishes, stringent fire prevention and safety procedures are necessary at restaurants that use commercial wood-fire grills. The build-up of grease in kitchen exhaust systems, specifically the hood filters and ductwork, can act as an accelerant when ignited by sparks or embers from the wood fire.

On August 8, 2008, a Lonestar Steakhouse in Middletown, Ohio, suffered this kind of fire. It took fire crews from three neighboring counties more than seven hours to contain the blaze. According to news reports, the fire started around 1 a.m. in the northwest section of the restaurant and spread quickly across the roof. Flames shot 10 to 15 feet in the air. Thankfully, no team members or customers were in the restaurant at the time.

It was later determined the fire was likely caused by grease and contaminants in the exhaust system.

“Within a couple of hours, 30 percent of the building was gone because there was no consistent cleaning of the hoods at the restaurant level,” said Brent Taylor, Senior Director of Facilities at Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle.

In the end, the damage was so extensive that the restaurant had to be demolished.

#### A Culture Change

The fire served as the company's wake-up call. It was evident that major corporate-wide changes were needed to prevent such fires in the future.

In September 2010, Patrick Drosch was named President and Chief Operating Officer of Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle. This appointment became the catalyst for change, starting with a new corporate philosophy.

Drosch introduced six cultural beliefs to the core of Lone Star/Texas Land & Cattle restaurants:

People First: I respect and treat people the way I want to be treated;

Stand Tall: I proudly serve the team, the guest and our brand;

Live Trust: I demonstrate integrity and cultivate an environment of trust;

Get Involved: I stay above the line and choose to make a positive impact on our key results;

Crave Feedback: I value all feedback to grow and improve; and

Win Now: I succeed when I consistently deliver balanced key results.

These beliefs became the company's hard line in the sand as Droesch only wanted to employ talented people who could earnestly embrace these values. While this meant a high personnel turnover rate, in the end, the company brought in dedicated and passionate team members who are working hard to serve the brand as well as customers today.

"Our general managers are the keys to our success and our future, and I'm optimistic that we are creating an experience for them that will begin to shape a different belief about the company, our leaders and our future," Droesch said. "My belief is that these leaders are ready to embrace this change and really make significant progress in driving great experiences for our team members, our guests, and thus growing our sales and our profits."

"This company is now all about 'People First,'" Taylor said. "To me, the most important people in this equation are the general managers and their team members."

Another important shift was to establish a facilities team, starting with the hire of Taylor in March. Taylor took the time to visit restaurants, ask operators what he could do for them and explain standard procedures and, most importantly, the reasons behind them. When he saw areas that needed improvements, instead of blame, Taylor focused on positive ways to rectify issues.

"If you take the time to help someone understand the why, they get on board a lot easier than forcing it down their throats," he said.

Taylor is based in the Plano Support Center (PSC) in Plano, Texas, which just opened a newly built training room. The support team now has a space to train operators and to provide a forum for the PSC to hear necessary feedback to improve decision-making.

With a small facilities team of two people serving 133 restaurants, they have to work smarter, which includes tapping the services of national vendors.

#### Achieving Consistency

Like many restaurants, Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle adopts NFPA 96 as its fire code, which calls for monthly cleanings of wood-burning grills. Before Droesch and Taylor came on board, there was no accountability for cleanings and inspections; management would only assume they were happening at the restaurant level. There also was no proper training about the importance of monthly hood cleanings. It was safe to say it was not happening consistently across the company.

Fire safety begins with preventative maintenance. At Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle, the new non-negotiable rule is to clean filters every night. They are removed, soaked overnight in a foodsafe degreaser and then washed in the dishwasher in the morning.

"If you do this consistently, you'll have a hood filter that sparkles and will last two to three years," Taylor said.

The company also has partnered with DunnWell and Facilitec, two nationwide kitchen exhaust cleaning vendors.

"If you look up and the ductwork visually looks clean, we don't ask general managers to get into the ductwork," Taylor said. "That's why you've got to make sure you have the right partner to help you get consistency."

On a quarterly basis, these vendors ensure the entire hood system is thoroughly cleaned from top to bottom. This includes the exhaust hoods, horizontal and vertical ductwork, rooftop exhaust fans, and proper grease containment and removal.

According to Taylor, these partners offer him peace of mind. If a fire occurs and there is even the slightest concern it was due to improper cleaning, the vendor takes full responsibility. And with DunnWell's before-and-after photo documentation, facility managers get the peace of mind that the cleaning was done correctly.

"Using a large, national vendor you get consistency and accountability, and accountability is huge in this line of work," Taylor said.

Another crucial part of fire safety is annual sprinkler inspections. Before Taylor joined the company, there was no consistent program for annual sprinkler inspections. With the fire in Middletown, Ohio, no one can be sure the sprinklers were even activated.

To remedy this, he partnered with Consolidated Fire Protection of Irvine, Calif. They took the ownership of providing consistency with proactive scheduling, deficiency reports and subsequent system corrections.

“Since we went to national vendors, changed the behavior and set non-negotiable procedures, we’ve had zero fires,” Taylor said.

#### Revolutionary Testing

The Texas Land & Cattle Steakhouse in Frisco, Texas, is currently testing a ground-breaking new filter. The Ellis Fibre Grease Lock System is a disposable and biodegradable grease removal device that is placed upstream of 1046 baffle-type grease filters. It is essentially a pre-filter to the filter. A patented fire-retardant-treated wool-fiber blend captures grease before it enters the filter and exhaust system. This results in fewer cleanings of the filters, hood and ductwork, saving time and money.

“The pre-filter will hopefully allow us to not have to clean the Charbroil every month,” Taylor said.

Testing began in July and, after two months, results are promising as the exhaust hoods remain clean.

Restaurants such as TGI Friday’s, Buffalo Wild Wings and Applebee’s have already installed the Grease Lock System. But with Lone Star/Texas Land & Cattle’s fire-grilling kitchens, vigorous testing is necessary before any product is rolled out company wide.

“I was in a location that had the system in for three months, and when I pulled down the filter and the baffle filter, the whole plenum was clean,” said Dawn Nordberg, CEO of North American Service and Supply, a distributor of the Grease Lock System. “You can literally wipe your arm on it and have nothing come off on your skin.”

Nordberg said an unexpected benefit of the Grease Lock System is the reduction of grease splatter from rooftop exhaust fans onto nearby air conditioning coils. When these coils get greasy, quarterly cleanings are necessary, but the system eliminates this cost as well.

“If this works, it is my belief this will be a game-changer because we’re going to save so much money,” Taylor said.

#### Gaining Visibility

To help better manage service calls, lower the cost of repairs and maintenance and ensure the use of qualified service companies, Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle is partnering with Corrigo to roll out a Web-based work order dispatch system by the end of the year.

For any service call, all a restaurant manager needs is an internet-connected browser. Fill out just three information fields—your name, the issue and your chosen vendor from the approved list—and service calls are processed, allowing restaurant managers to spend more time with guests and on running the business.

“If you can order a book on Amazon, you can place a work order and get it accepted by a vendor,” said Tom Kay, Director of National Accounts at Corrigo.

There’s even an iPhone and iPad app that allows Taylor to approve quotes above the district manager’s budget. With one click, Taylor can approve or decline a quote.

In addition to fast and efficient service scheduling, Taylor will have complete visibility into all his restaurants. He will be able to see all open and closed work orders, what vendors are performing the work, and vendors’ certificates of insurance and warranties. With this information, Taylor can run customized analytic reports, such as budget versus actual, capital expense, equipment successes versus failures and vendor performance, which provides in-depth insight to help him better run the business.

“We have a hierarchy structure whereby nothing falls through the cracks,” Kay said. “Our customers process more than 10 million work orders annually, and if you run a simple ROI analysis, on average, the savings realized by our valued customers translate to roughly 10 to 15 percent per work order.”

#### Proud Partnerships

For Lone Star Steakhouse/Texas Land & Cattle, these important vendor partnerships help the small facilities department work smarter as well as save time and money. Placing critical components of the business into the care of these vendors is a testament to the level of confidence and trust that is involved. With the staff of 28 working with these partners, the facility department’s outreach and capability have increased exponentially.

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