HOME-RAISED

By Kindra Gordon

The menu boldly tells you everything you need to know at the Brickhouse Café and Saloon located near Giants Stadium in San Francisco – It touts: "Owner Sourced Salmon and Wagyu Beef." Additional menu messaging boasts: "Home of the Original Big Ass Burger."

The popular café was established in 2001 – and has thrived at the same location for 14 years, which is quite an accomplishment in the highly competitive San Francisco Bay restaurant market.

The eatery is owned and operated by Fred Reeves and Kim Kobasic, who say their mission when they started was to provide deliciously wholesome, high quality, reasonably priced food, with a comfortable space to eat it in. They continue to be guided by that principle today – and take pride in offering personable, friendly service with directly sourced, farm/sea to table menu items.

"We've been directly sourcing before it was such a fad," says Kim, who took a few minutes out of her busy schedule to provide comments for this article in early June. (Fred had just left for his annual summer fishing trek to Alaska and wasn't going to return until late July. While away from the restaurant he is First Mate on the "Potential" and the "Wanda Lee," with some of his experiences featured at www.tailsfrombristolbay.com).

Kobasic and Reeves have worked in the restaurant business from a young age – working in restaurants as teenagers and throughout college. She tells, "Fred had experience in both the kitchen and front of house. I had front of house service and management experience. My former profession was event planning. Freddy was a welder, but grew up working on the cattle ranch, showing in 4-H since he was very young."

Indeed, Fred's Wagyu connection comes from his family's ranch, The Bar R Cattle Co. at Snake River, Washington. His father Jerry Reeves was one of the early pioneers in the Wagyu industry in the States raising fullblood Wagyu.

Thus, when Fred and Kim opened their restaurant it was a natural to source Wagyu beef from the Reeves' ranch.

"When we first started the restaurant, Wagyu 'Kobe' beef wasn't very well known or as highly valued, so we were using it for all of our burgers," says Kobasic.

Today, the full-service restaurant offers breakfast, lunch and dinner. The menu features an array of burgers, salads and entrees – from lamb meatloaf to shrimp and grits, and of course that "wild owner caught salmon." Wagyu items include a specialty Wagyu burger and "Kobe" cuts served with blue cheese mashed potatoes and asparagus. Their signature burgers include clever combinations like the Foolish Freddy Burger topped with pineapple salsa, ham, provolone, and chipotle aioli or the SoMa Burger topped with Swiss, caramelized onion, wild mushrooms and avocado – to name two of about a dozen tantalizing options. All burgers can be served with Wagyu beef upon request for a $5 upcharge.

Kobasic says that after 14 years in business they have definitely developed a following for their Wagyu beef. She says, "Many swear by our Wagyu and won't eat anything else on the menu. We often hear that ours is the best they've ever had."

She knows that the story behind their food has also contributed to that dedicated customer following. She shares, "People are just over the moon about our story. They find it very unique and I think it really adds to our atmosphere of authenticity. We're also very hands on so one of us is often there to tell the narrative behind our sourcing. Freddy's a fantastic storyteller and always has some entertaining tales from his mischievous days on the farm and more recent high jinks on the boat."

Find the Brickhouse Café and Saloon at 426 Brannum Street, San Francisco, Calif.; or online at www.brickhousesf.com. They are open 7 days a week for what they describe on their website as "a delightfully nourishing, early breakfast, followed by a killer lunch, deliciously bad-ass dinner and a sinfully scrumptious weekend brunch." They also offer a full bar with wine, beer and signature cocktails. Happy Hour is Monday through Saturday 3-7pm, featuring both food and drink specials.