

# Beverly Lynch lassoes 'Golden' results with new selections at buffet chain

By Lori Lohmeyer



Golden Corral's food and beverage director, Beverly Lynch, is charged with the daunting task of ensuring that product consistency prevails throughout the 480-unit chain.

With more than 350 franchised and 120 company-operated restaurants, the grill-buffet chain reported that systemwide sales rose 12.3 percent, to \$1.2 billion, in 2002, compared with \$1 billion in 2001.

Golden Corral said

same-store sales rose 5.4 percent for the year, and the company added 30 new restaurants to its system. According to Lynch, the chain's success is centered on its home-style menu options, which offer something for everyone.

A native of Ohio, Lynch moved to North Carolina in March 1993 when she accepted the top chef position at Golden Corral. According to Lynch, positions working at a grocery-store chain and teaching culinary classes helped prepare her for developing menu items for the chain.

**Title:** director of food and beverage, Golden Corral, Raleigh, N.C.

**Birth date:** Feb. 22, 1951

**Hometown:** Cleveland, Ohio

**Education:** bachelor of science and master of science degrees in food and nutrition and education from Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio

**Career highlight:** "Working with an incredible group of people [at Golden Corral]. We're a large company with a very small support staff. We test 50 to 60 products a year and we have a culinary staff of three people."

**Personal:** Married, two children ages 18 and 13. "They think their mother has the best job in the world because all she does is eat and talk all day. But they reap the benefits from the test kitchen, too."

**What led you to take the position at Golden Corral?**

At the time, I was working for a cafeteria chain. I was approached to see if I was interested in relocating. It was at a time in Golden Corral's history when the chain was moving from the family-steakhouse category to the steak-buffet and bakery concept. I looked at it as a great opportunity to make an impact on a company. We offer every aspect of food, from cold prep to meats to the bakery. For me it was a challenge, and yet I would never get bored because we're constantly looking at new products.

**How did you change the menu when you came on board?**

When I came on board Golden Corral was using a lot of prepackaged products. Someone wanted chicken cacciatore on the menu, they would find a manufacturer that could give it to them. At previous positions, I made everything from scratch, including gravies and au jus. We started bringing in raw commodities that we could work with. Now we make meat loaf using a scratch recipe. We created a pot-roast recipe that slow cooks for 12 hours.

**Was it difficult for the company to make the transition to recipes made from scratch?**

I think a big part was taking those scratch recipes and

As food and beverage director Beverly Lynch sees that the menu at the buffet concept pleases a diverse range of customers. To meet a variety of dietary needs there's a huge selection on the cold bar and salads are made in house, she says.

learning how to get them communicated and trained [to our employees]. That's where my teaching background comes in. I had to decide how to take a complex product, roll it out at 400 restaurants across the United States and be consistent. I think I brought a lot of that [consistency] to the menu.

**How did your previous jobs contribute to your new post at Golden Corral?**

I think teaching did. I also worked for a grocery store, so I knew a lot about purchasing. I ran a culinary school, so I also had the opportunity to notice how different people handled food. I did an experiment to see how a group of people would make chocolate-chip cookies from the same recipe. You'll be surprised at how different the product looks. How you handle the mixing and baking is a science, but you have to figure out how to incorporate the art into it.

**With so much attention being paid to obesity, do you keep that in mind when developing items? Do you feel a responsibility to add healthful items to the menu?**

We have such wide menu offerings, that we pretty much meet everyone's dietary needs. There's a huge selection on the cold bar. We make all of our salads in house. There's fresh-baked potatoes, fresh sweet potatoes and we do baked fish or fried fish. The guest who wants healthy products can come in and get it. Admittedly, our vegetables are right next to a cheese sauce. It's pretty much in the hands of the guests. One of the newest products is Brussels sprouts. They're just steamed in a light, dry seasoning and margarine.

**What are the biggest challenges of working at a buffet?**

The biggest challenge is consistency. When you're grinding your own meat and blending seasoning it's hard to make it consistent. We work on photographs and step-by-step, detailed procedures in each recipe to ensure consistent execution of our key products.

**What are the key factors to keep in mind when developing menu items at Golden Corral?**

First, Golden Corral looks at every product from its flavor profile. Two days a month we have vendor days. Anyone



with an idea can come in and use our test kitchen. We can easily change the menu and add new products because we don't have to wait for a new menu to come out. To facilitate our steaks on the buffet we added grills. As a result, we're now looking at how we utilize the flame grill and flat grill to do more cooking out in front of the guest.

**What is the new product-development process at the chain?**

First everything is taste-tested, looking at flavor profiles to see what our guests would like to have. We actually are very fortunate to have Ted Fowler as our CEO and president, he taste-tests every product with us. The second thing we look at is cost per ounce. Then we have stores that test products, and, ultimately, our customers tell us whether the product will make it. We put the product on the menu and buffet and then interview close to 2,000 guests who tell us whether it was a popular enough product. A group of operators and franchisees make the decision on whether we'll roll out the product.

**What are some popular new menu additions?**

Our Bourbon Street chicken.

**How did you come up with the idea to add the item?**

We actually were doing a steak promotion. We'd ordered the sauce for a steak promotion, and at the last moment it got canceled. So we had \$65,000 worth of sauce that we had to figure out how to use. We took that sauce, some dry seasonings and through a marinating process [created the item], and it's very popular.

## CHEF'S TIPS

- Experiment with different spices and seasonings. For example, don't be afraid to put Cajun spices on salmon or lime flavoring on chicken.
- Try grilling more things such as breads, cakes and vegetables.



