

# Applebee's® Ignites 2,000 New Wood-Fired Grills across U.S. and Introduces Hand-Cut Steaks as First Step in Recapturing America's Neighborhoods

## With sizzle and American oak smoke, biggest marketing outreach in brand's history kicks off tonight

GLENDALE, Calif., May 16, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar® today moved decisively to take back America's neighborhoods – the roots of its rise as the country's largest casual dining restaurant chain – by unveiling new American-made, wood-fired grills as the centerpiece of nearly 2,000 of its U.S. restaurants and introducing certified USDA Choice steaks hand-cut in-house as the signature item of a revamped and streamlined menu that elevates quality, flavor and freshness.

Inviting guests to follow the enticing aroma of American oak smoke into their neighborhood Applebee's, the brand tonight kicks off the largest and most comprehensive marketing and advertising campaign in its history. In a new series of ads, Applebee's expects to achieve historic levels of mindshare through penetration of traditional broadcast and cable TV channels, prominent online platforms and movie theaters. The campaign's intent is to tell consumers the new "Hand-Cut, Wood-Fired" platform is the first chapter in a new Applebee's story.



"We're in the midst of a transformation at Applebee's, and we are recommitting ourselves to every aspect of the guest experience," said Julia Stewart, chairman and CEO of Applebee's parent company DineEquity, Inc. [NYSE: DIN] and president of Applebee's. "Food is, of course, central to that, and in talking to guests, we discovered that a platform built on 'USDA Choice,' 'hand-cut in-house' and 'wood-fired' was not only powerful but had the potential to differentiate us in a noisy and crowded market."

Added Ms. Stewart: "This goes far beyond a few new menu items or a limited-time offer. This is the biggest investment in culinary excellence in the company's history – transforming the menu, instilling pride in franchisee team members, delighting current guests and giving others a reason to come back."

The first menu items to hit the grills are certified USDA Choice Top Sirloin Steaks and Bone-In Pork Chops. Both items are hand-cut in Applebee's restaurants by trained meat cutters before they hit the grill with sizzle and smoke. Guests will immediately recognize something is new at their local Applebee's as wood corrals stacked with split American oak logs greet them at the entrance along with the mouth-watering aroma of oak wood grilling.

Since its creation in suburban Atlanta in 1980, Applebee's has become part of the fabric of American life, a warm and familiar presence where everyone feels like an invited guest. Through its involvement in the communities it serves and its long-recognized support of active and retired U.S. military men and women, Applebee's has become a neighborhood institution. But in recent years, shifting consumer tastes and brand perception issues have challenged its business performance.

The moves being initiated today are the first in a series of actions meant to change the story. Embracing its heritage and igniting its relevance and appeal to today's consumers, Applebee's seeks to solidify its standing as America's first choice grill and bar. Through the introduction of its new food platform and ongoing efforts to revitalize its bar offering, remodel existing restaurants and introduce new restaurant designs, the brand will tell its story anew.

Applebee's new advertising campaign, created by the brand's Kansas City-based ad agency, Barkley, features a series of 15- and 30-second spots aimed at bringing back fans and winning over critics with straight-talk, authenticity and powerful, up-close visuals of the new wood-fired grill platform.

The spots tell Applebee's "Hand-Cut, Wood-Fired" story with a confident brand voice and a natural energy that stands in stark contrast to the manufactured frenzy pervading most restaurant advertising. The new ads feature slow, unflinching shots of hand-cut steaks being "seared to smoky-oak perfection" on Applebee's "fire-breathing workhorse" grill. The appeal of the spots is further fueled by iconic rock music, including AC/DC's

signature "Rock 'n' Roll Ain't Noise Pollution."

Starting today, Applebee's menu will include a variety of selections from the wood-fired grill, including:

- 6 oz., 8 oz. and 12 oz. Hand-Cut USDA Choice Top Sirloin Steaks
- Hand-Cut, Bone-In Pork Chop with honey apple chutney and Cajun seasoning
- Cedar-Grilled Salmon with maple mustard glaze
- Wood-Fired Grilled Chicken Breast

Additionally, meats and vegetables prepared on the new wood-fired grills will be featured in many other guest favorites - from appetizers to salads. Purchase and installation of the grills, a combined 60,000 hours of training for meat cutters and the marketing campaign to support the introduction represent an investment of more than \$75 million by Applebee's franchisees.

"Together with our franchisees, we're building the Applebee's of tomorrow - embracing the best parts of our neighborhood roots and our passion for bringing people together, while transforming the guest experience in ways that enhance our connection with today's consumers," said Ms. Stewart. "If you haven't been to Applebee's in a while, it's a different place than you remember."

Applebee's new wood-fired grills and the hand-cut steaks and other menu items cooked on them are available at participating Applebee's restaurants across the U.S.

### **About Applebee's®**

Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar offers a lively bar and grill experience combining hand-crafted drinks and simple, craveable American fare with flare. All Applebee's restaurants are owned and operated by entrepreneurs dedicated to serving their communities and offering the best in food and drinks with genuine, neighborly service. With more than 2,000 locations in 49 states, Guam, Puerto Rico and 15 countries, Applebee's is one of the world's largest casual dining brands. Applebee's is franchised by subsidiaries of DineEquity, Inc. [NYSE: DIN], which is among the world's largest full-service restaurant companies.

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