



2013 Baking Hall of Fame



W. Clark Pulver Pulver Systems

Raised in rural Illinois the eldest of four children, Willis Clark Pulver moved his family to Chicago in 1928 and began working as a mechanic at one of three bakeries operated by the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co. During the next 20 years he rose through the ranks to become the bakery's chief engineer when he saw an opportunity and the entrepreneur bug bit.

That opportunity was in the area of automating material and product handling. In the late 1940s, A&P's state-of-the-art bakery could crank out 40 loaves of bread per minute. Mr. Pulver realized manual product handling wouldn't be able to keep up with increasing production rates. Working with his regional superintendent Frank Velten, he began designing and building conveyors for others while still doing his chief engineering duties at A&P.

Eventually, word spread of Mr. Pulver's talents. Demand for his equipment spread, and something had to give. In 1948, Velten & Pulver was born.

Mr. Pulver's reputation as a hard-working problem solver led to him working with many members of the Quality Bakers of America (Q.B.A.) along the East coast. Routinely, he would hop in his Packard, drive to a customer's plant, analyze the situation, sell his solution,

return home, build the equipment and then install it.

"Often, nothing more than a handshake secured the deal," his biography by the American Society of Baking noted.

By 1951, Velten & Pulver had outgrown their initial "hobby shop" and built their first "real shop," a 2,000-square-foot facility. But by 1954 the company was expanding again — the first of many expansions — more than tripling the shop's size.

In the mid-1950s, his eldest son Bill joined the family business. Although his son had a mechanical engineering degree, the young man soon discovered there was much to learn from his hands-on, self-educated father. Working with a team of designers and craftsmen, they developed systems that included cooling conveyors and switching mechanisms that delivered bread from the depanner to the slicers. The company pioneered automatic pan stacking, and its systems eventually led to the successful introduction of automated basket and tray loading systems.

During the next 30 years, the company acquired many U.S. and international patents for product handling equipment design.

Among the patents were ones filed for a machine

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRENT ENGSTROM



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for slitting the upper surfaces of a plurality of parallel rows of proofed dough pieces on a conveyor, including a plurality of spray nozzles

respectively in general vertical alignment with the longitudinal midline of the path of each row of proofed dough pieces. He also patented a machine

for transferring rows of discrete articles from a moving conveyor and, in particular, for use in unloading rows of fragile baked products from a bakery oven and transferring the baked articles to further bakery processing operations.

Additionally, Mr. Pulver developed patented rod belt conveyors, oven loaders and unloaders, continuous chain bread

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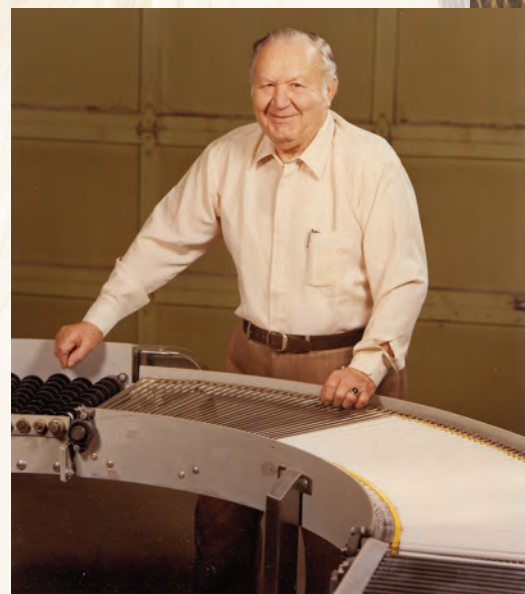


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and roll coolers, snack cake loaders, and basket and wire pallet loaders for bread and buns.

In the 1960s, the company partnered with DuPont to discover ways to incorporate plastic components in bakery equipment. The partnership also led to several widely used wear components for the industry.

In the 1970s, Pulver Systems designed a conveyORIZED system for McDonald's drive-throughs that delivered food from the kitchen across the dining room to the delivery window. In all, more than 200 of these systems were sold to the restaurant chain.

By the time he retired in 1973, Pulver Systems had grown to an organization of 100 employees and the underpinnings were in place for the company's future growth into a 70,000-square-foot facility employing nearly 200 people. His legacy of achievements left the industry and his community stronger. Mr. Pulver died in November 2001 at the age of 95.

A Q.B.A. director of engineering wrote

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2013 Baking Hall of Fame

to Mr. Pulver upon his retirement, "I can't imagine the industry being as advanced as it is today without calling to mind many of your contributions."

In a nomination letter submitted in support of Mr. Pulver, Jim Dunbar, vice-president of operations at Dunbar Systems, Inc., wrote, "Clark's greatest achievement was the development of his people. He was always proud and should be recognized for the development of the people that worked with him and for him over the many years at Pulver Systems and Velten & Pulver Inc. I am certain if you asked ex-Pulver employees to stand during any A.S.B. assembly you would be surprised of the number of individuals still in the baking industry today."

Accepting the Baking Hall of Fame award on his father's behalf, Richard Pulver said his father's determination, matched with the strength he recognized in others, led to many new and innovative products.

"Creative genius, tireless worker, bulldog mentality and the highest ethical standards — put these all together and you have Clark Pulver," Richard Pulver said. "But his ultimate success required something more, the opportunity to demonstrate these traits. You see what made dad truly successful was not only his talents but the relationships he built with some of the finest people on the earth, the bakers of America. For him to be honored by the American Society of Baking, his peers, is something he would have been humbled by, and we, his family, will always cherish." MBN

