



Eddie Lanham

Lanham Machinery

William Edwin (Eddie) Lanham drew inspiration from famous Americans, including Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, and from other industries, even the dry cleaning industry. He put such inspiration and innovation to work in changing the baking industry, pushing automation into new territory.

The late Mr. Lanham is named in more than 26 patents on baking equipment, and, as of this year, he's also in the American Society of Baking's Hall of Fame.

While in high school he was invited to meet Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, in Fort Myers, Fla.

"With the summer visit, dad learned to think way out of the box," his son, Bob Lanham, said in a Hall of Fame acceptance speech March 5 in Chicago. "He wanted to tinker with everything."

Mr. Lanham and his two brothers were the third generation of their family to be involved in the baking industry. He worked for Southern Bakeries in Tampa, Fla.; Miami and Atlanta before starting Lanham Machinery and Service in 1947.

"Dad, being a tinkerer and having to have his hands on everything, went into the engineering side," Bob Lanham said.

The company introduced the first continuous cooler in 1949. Eddie Lanham and Gene Miller, a salesman with the company, became partners and restructured the company in 1952 as Lanham Machinery Co. Mr. Miller sold his interest in the company in 1972, but Eddie Lanham served as president and chief executive officer until his retirement in 1989.

"Dad was a people person," Bob Lanham said. "He knew each employee in the company and liked to involve them in new ideas."

Eddie Lanham's desire to "tinker" continued both at work and away from work. Once on a family trip before cars had air conditioning, he filled up a milk box with dry ice and turned a fan on to keep the car cool, Bob Lanham said. The family stopped for gas in Georgia. The gas station attendant was alarmed that the family, on a hot August day, was in the car with the windows rolled up. His dad showed

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the gas station attendant that the car was cool.

Bob Lanham said his father always was interested in getting bakery product from the make-up area to packaging. To accomplish his goal, he studied the assembly line concept for automobiles set up by Henry Ford. Once Eddie Lanham went to pick up laundry at a dry cleaner business and noticed how the conveyor worked.

"He said, 'You know, if I turn that upside down, I can put bread on it,'" Bob Lanham said.

Lanham Machinery Co. in 1967 introduced the first conveyORIZED proofing and baking system, a system of spiral conveyors. Invention in the area of automation and expansion into other continents took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

One patent involved an invention to automatically introduce, stack, remove, unstuck and store pans in a baking process. Another patent involved an invention to provide for an oven construction in which the baked foods are subjected to substantially uniform baking conditions throughout the oven. A patent even led to the control of the exhaust duct of the baking oven.

The company began expanding geographically. Licensing agreements were made, first with Fujisawa Baking Machines of Osaka, Japan, in 1975 to manufacture there. Manufacturing was licensed to Australia in 1979 and to England in 1989. From those locations, Lanham Machinery was able to service a good deal of the world.

Eddie Lanham's retirement came in 1989 when APV Baker, Inc. acquired Atlanta-based Lanham Machinery Co. During his career, he gave back to the baking industry, serving as president of BEMA from 1976-78 and serving on the Baking Industry Exposition Committee from 1978-89.

He made a difference not only in the baking industry, but also in his community. Lanham Machinery employed mentally and physically challenged workers.

"It was really awesome to go down this area and see these people working," Bob Lanham said. "It was really an honor to work with these people."

Eddie Lanham was a leader in the founding of the Christian City Children's Home. The organization began

at Christmas time in 1961 with the idea of combining a retirement community with a place for children that had been abused, abandoned or had special needs. The elderly were to be like grandparents or parents for the children, Bob Lanham said. Today there are more than 1,000 residents at Christian City in Union City, Ga.

Eddie Lanham remained on the Christian City board of directors until he died on May 17, 1991, at the age of 76. Another baking honor came his way in 2002 when he was presented with BEMA's first posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award.

