

Charles T. Meyer

Next time a brown'n serve roll is served at Thanksgiving dinner, remember to give thanks to Charles T. Meyer, a man recognized for helping bring the brown'n serve technology to widespread acceptance and one of this year's inductees into the American

Society of Baking Hall of Fame.

Mr. Meyer began his baking career in 1907 at the age of 18 as a driver of a bread wagon. Four years later, he used \$80 in savings and \$150 from the sale of his horse and buggy to open American Bakery in downtown Little Rock, Ark.

Mr. Meyer would gradually grow the business, adding a horse-drawn wagon for wholesale delivery in 1912, transitioning to an automobile in 1914, and eventually, adding air service. Mr. Meyer received his pilot's license in 1928 and was an active flyer until his 75th birthday, often times using his private aircraft to assist flood-ravaged communities.

Initially entrenched in the retail bread business, Mr. Meyer entered the wholesale business in 1912, the same year he bought American Bakery and renamed it Meyer's Bakery. Initial demand from area grocers expanded to include tremendous demand for the bakery's products thanks to its proximity to a military camp during World War I. By 1927, Meyer's Bakery employed 150 persons and operated 49 trucks.

Mr. Meyer is perhaps best known, though, for his role in adopting brown'n serve baking technology. Initially, clustered rolls tried in many plants were not successful, with doughy parts between the rolls left underbaked. After his son Charles Jr. returned from a trip to Texarkana, Ark., in which the younger Meyer observed brown'n serve rolls selling very well, the two set to work on developing their own technique. Mr. Meyer conceived the idea of putting two dough balls into a cupcake pan, a formula that worked well.

Father and son ultimately decided that to create the best product, brown'n serve rolls would need to be the only baked food produced at a given bakery. As a result, they





A Meyer's Bakery truck in front of the company's Hope, Ark., plant.



Charles T. Meyer Sr. was an active pilot until his 75th birthday.

converted the Hope, Ark., facility to a brown'n serve plant. The products were deemed a success and helped transform Meyer's Bakery into a nationally recognized organization with four baking plants serving 42 states and producing more than 279 brand name products.

Mr. Meyer, nicknamed "Paw Paw," remained active in the business until he was well into his 70s. He died in 1976 at the age of 87.

In accepting the Hall of Fame award on behalf of his grandfather, Charles Meyer III said the brown'n serve technology serves as a shining example of one of the keys to success for companies — dynamic change in new product concepts.

In the 1950s there were virtually no partially baked or brown-and-serve products.

"It doesn't make sense," Mr. Meyer III said of the decision to give the technology a try. "Why would the home-maker go to the supermarket and buy a bakery product that's partially baked when she could buy one that's already fully baked? So, that is a risk we took.

"We became known as the baker's baker."

Meyer's in the 1960s turned its focus from route distribution of branded products to private label production, and by 1978 had shifted product emphasis to English muffins and other specialty products.

In 2005, New York-based private equity firm Ripplewood Holdings — Meyer's Bakeries majority owner since 1999 — sold the Meyer's baking business in Hope, Ark., and Wichita, Kas., to Southern Bakeries L.L.C., an affiliate of Harlan Bakeries, Inc. In addition, a facility in Arizona City, Ariz., was sold to Premier Bakers, Inc., and a plant in Orlando, Fla., was sold to Mid-Gulf Bakery L.L.C., an affiliate of Weston Foods, Inc. ■



Charles Meyer III by his grandfather's plaque.