

## 2009 Baking Hall of Fame



**Louis Kuchuris**

A handshake helped Louis Kuchuris on his way to the hall. In 1955, he and Ray Kroc shook on a deal in which Mary Ann, a bakery in the Chicago area owned by Mr. Kuchuris, would supply buns to Chicago-area McDonald's owned by Mr. Kroc.

Both men were destined for success on a global scale. East Balt Commissary, founded by Mr. Kuchuris in 1969, continues to supply buns to McDonald's and operates in 14 countries. Such accomplishments earned the late Mr. Kuchuris his place in the 2009 Baking Hall of Fame class.

"I've known bakers by the dozen, and I will tell you — when you talk about the best, when you're looking for the hall of famer — one name pops out — Louis Kuchuris," said Fred Turner, honorary chairman of McDonald's Corp. "Louie was larger than life. He stepped straight out of Damon Runyon and Horatio Alger.

"He was a true character — a survivor in a tough, competitive business, a friend, a partner who made the best buns in the business."

Louis Kuchuris was born to Greek immigrant parents on July 16, 1913. His father died when Louis was 6, said Frank Kuchuris, the son of Louis and now chairman and chief executive officer of East Balt Commissary.

From an early age, Louis Kuchuris was no stranger to hard work. He became involved in the bakery business at 12 and delivered Greek bread to homes by horse and wagon, Mr. Turner said. He became a driver for Atlas Baking Co. and later bought the company.

In 1939, Mr. Kuchuris bought Mary Ann, a bakery on the northwest side of Chicago that produced a line of bread, rolls, buns and pastries. Mr. Kuchuris paid \$8,000 for the bakery, which was bankrupt at the time, Mr. Turner said.

"Louie told all the creditors they would be paid off, and in just a couple of years, he was doing 50 times the business," Mr. Turner said.

Mary Ann serviced restaurants, snack shops, drive-ins, hotels, schools and caterers. Mr. Kroc, meanwhile, was starting his McDonald's empire in Des Plaines, Ill.

"Ray placed an ad in the paper for franchises, saying he would soon be selling thousands and thousands of hamburgers," Mr. Turner said. "Louie translated that into thousands and thousands of buns."

No written contracts exist to show how the Mary Ann bakery began supplying McDonald's. A handshake cemented the deal, which was how Mr. Kroc and Mr. Kuchuris wanted it.

"Dad was one of the old-timers," Frank Kuchuris said. "He believed in people."

The Mary Ann buns met with satisfaction from Mr. Kroc and his McDonald's customers.

"As Ray's 'bun guy,' I had the treat of working extensively with Louie," said Mr. Turner, who began working for McDonald's in 1956. "The buns were made with special flour — less water, fewer chemicals, less air. We took 'very good' and made it 'the best' and then kept on improving."

Mr. Turner said McDonald's once faced a financial crisis in 1959. Mr. Kuchuris was one of five suppliers to loan the restaurant chain \$25,000.

"Four of them took debentures in return, but Louie didn't want any of that," Mr. Turner said. "He



*Louis Kuchuris*



Francis and Louis Kuchuris.

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Byron Baird (far right), chairman of the A.S.B. Hall of Fame Committee, presented the plaque to the Kuchuris family.

MARGO KUCHURIS WISEMAN

wrote us a check on the spot."

Expansion plans followed for both Mr. Kroc and Mr. Kuchuris. In 1969, Mr. Kuchuris built East Balt Commissary, an automatic bun bakery that exclusively serviced 40 McDonald's in the Chicago area.

"Dad had faith in Ray," Frank Kuchuris said of the need to expand.

East Balt Commissary was well established when Mr. Kuchuris died on his 70th birthday, July 16, 1983. Today, East Balt owns 20 bakeries in 14 different countries and supplies about 9,000 McDonald's worldwide.



Francis and Louis Kuchuris.

"The Kuchuris family continues to be one of the crown jewels in McDonald's supply chain crown," Mr. Turner said.

After all the success, the allegiance of Mr. Kuchuris to his Greek immigrant roots may be seen every year in June in Chicago during the Greek Independence Day Parade. Mr. Kuchuris played the instrumental role of chairman when the parade was created in 1967.

His legacy to family and friends was evident during the March 2 Hall of Fame ceremony in Chicago. The Kuchuris contingent numbered more than 30.

His principles about running a business remain at East Balt, too.

"The biggest thing is trust and honesty, whether it be with customers, employees' families — the totality of it, trust and openness and honesty," Frank Kuchuris said. MBN



Louis Kuchuris quickly turned around the fortunes of the Mary Ann bakery when he bought it in 1939.



Daughter Marietta Kuchuris Feldman, wife Francis Kuchuris and son Frank Kuchuris accepted the Hall of Fame plaque in honor of the late Louis Kuchuris.

MARGO KUCHURIS WISEMAN