

John F. Popp

John F. Popp calls himself part of the “maintenance” crew responsible for growing Perfection Bakeries, Inc., the business his grandfather, John. B. Franke, founded in 1901. Under Popp’s leadership, the company had continued to expand in the Midwest, and it remains committed to customer service and perfection.

“My grandfather was the true entrepreneur,” says John F. Popp, president, Perfection Bakeries, Inc. “He started as a hardware store clerk, then moved to Fort Wayne to start baking biscuits, which were the snack food of choice in the early 1900s. By the 1920s the company had grown, and we were the first bakery in Indiana to offer wrapped bread. At this time of growth, however, in 1927, my grandfather was killed in a car accident.”

With Franke’s death, Fort Wayne lost a generous man and a nature lover, Popp says of his grandfather. Among his gifts to the community, Franke donated an 80-acre farm to the city for what is now Franke Park.

Popp says his father, H. Leslie Popp Sr., took the business reins after his grandfather’s death. His father, he says, introduced sliced bread to the area and expanded the bakery to include interstate business and new product development.

During the 1950s, consumer needs were changing, Popp says. As the bakery passed its 50th anniversary, cracker and cookie lines were phased out. An emphasis on developing quality breads became the company’s focus.

“In 1956, after I had earned my college degree in Business Administration and served in the military, I went to work in the family business,” Popp says. “The company was growing, and my father, my uncle and my older brother were all working there, too. Because there were plenty of family members in the business, in 1967 I decided I wanted to do something else. That’s when I became a realtor.”

For 13 years, Popp was an active real estate agent, successful in that field.

“I came back into the business because the family needed me,” Popp says. “Soon after becoming the company’s president, we were able to acquire Way Baking Company in Jackson, Michigan, and renew our emphasis on continued expansion into Ohio and southern Indiana.”

Today Perfection Bakeries operates seven bakeries in three states and distributes brands throughout most of Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. Perfection Bakeries’ bread products are sold under various brand names.

In the late 1980s, Perfection Bakeries created its own brand of bread products – Aunt Millie’s. And the brand has been so successful that today the company operates under the Aunt Millie’s name.

“Aunt Millie represents the aunt or grandmother we all had who used to bake bread. Don’t we all remember going into her kitchen, smelling the aroma and feeling the ambiance that process created?” Popp says. “That brand was the brainchild of my son, Bohn, our vice president of marketing. My other son, Christopher, is the company’s vice president of human resources.”

To remain competitive, Popp says he strives to keep the company two years ahead of the competition.

A strong believer in the American free enterprise system, Popp says it “allows every person to participate, to do what they want and let the markets work. And being in business keeps you sharp because every day is a challenge and it keeps you thinking. It’s a challenge I enjoy.”

Popp says he is proud to share his success with others through his involvement in charitable efforts. He served on the Southwest Allen County School board for 16 years, and he has long supported the Women’s Care Center in downtown Fort Wayne. He has also taught Junior Achievement lessons in the classroom: “I remember teaching at Ben Geyer middle school and seeing the excitement on the kids’ faces when I passed around an actual stock certificate. They had never seen that kind of document before.”