

2009 Baking Hall of Fame



Dora Schwebel

It is thanks to the hard work and determination of Dora Schwebel that Schwebel Baking Co. survived the Great Depression and continued to thrive afterward.

Dora and her husband, Joseph, were co-founders of the company, but he died suddenly a year before the stock market crash in 1929 leaving his wife behind to run the business and raise six children during the Great Depression.

Despite the odds, Mrs. Schwebel managed to keep the company going through the difficult 1930s and raise the children all at the same time.

"No one expected Dora Schwebel to hold the company together under such circumstances," said Alyson Winick, Mrs. Schwebel's granddaughter. "But this strong woman with clear, penetrating eyes and a determined jaw — she had strength."

The couple started the company in 1906 when

Joseph and Dora Schwebel began baking out of their home in Campbell, Ohio. After the business was up and running they started out baking about 40 loaves a day and selling door-to-door. However, previously in 1905 Joseph and a business partner had gone broke in their efforts to start the business, so the Schwebels borrowed \$300 from Dora's brother and started again. After that initial experience, Mrs. Schwebel reportedly told her husband not to have any other business partners.

Ms. Winick said her grandmother delivered bread in wicker laundry baskets by bicycle to other immigrants in

the area. She said quality, personal service and same-day freshness were seen as values identified early on in company history.

In 1914, the company began delivering bread to "mom and pop" stores by horse and buggy, and by 1923 with an investment of \$25,000 they opened a small bakery that made 1,000 loaves of bread a day and had six delivery trucks. Then in 1928 tragedy struck when Joseph



Dora Schwebel, left, with Eleanor Roosevelt, seated at the right.



Rudolph Nesnidal, left, with Dora Schwebel and Harry Ostroff, right. Mr. Nesnidal and Mr. Ostroff were the first two men to retire from Schwebel Baking Co.

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MARGO KUCHARIS WISEMAN

died suddenly at the age of 46.

Mrs. Schwebel's advisers, suppliers and closest confidants recommended and even urged her to sell the business. They told her it would be nearly impossible for a woman operating alone in the bakery business under such circumstances.

"She wouldn't hear of it," Ms. Winick said. "She pushed on. Clearly they had underestimated Dora Schwebel. This was no ordinary woman."

Ms. Winick said her grandmother contacted flour mills to persuade them to offer credit, and as a personal guarantee said she would even clean mill floors on her hands and knees.

"Fortunately that guarantee was never needed," Ms. Winick said.

Mrs. Schwebel was able to negotiate a number of

Mrs. Schwebel's granddaughter, Alyson Winick, left, with John Del Campo, a member of the A.S.B. Hall of Fame Committee.

agreements that helped keep the business going. Thanks to such efforts, the company kept going strong throughout the depression. Mrs. Schwebel's work helped double sales and provide food for those in need during this period. In 1932 Happy the Clown was introduced as a trademark on bread packages to help brighten people's spirits despite such difficult times. In 1936 the company moved into a new \$100,000 bakery, and the facilities were expanded in 1938 and 1941.

Demand for the company's products built quite steadily in the 1940s after the war ended and the baby boom began.

In 1951, a new facility was built in Youngstown, Ohio, for \$1 million, and the facility was known as "The Million-Dollar Bakery." With the opening of the new facility, the company also introduced Schwebel's Toasti-Taste

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Preceding these events, in the late 1940s Mrs. Schwebel called together the family and said she wanted to expand because the neighboring mills and their soot made it impossible to keep the bakery clean, and the company needed to expand to get away from the dirty mills. Of the 11 family members in the

room that day, every one but Mrs. Schwebel were against the expansion. But her one vote ended up carrying all the weight, and expansion followed.

"The new bakery is for the future," Mrs. Schwebel was quoted as saying at the time in 1951. "It is for my family, to provide for their security and the security of the boys



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Dora Schwebel



Alyson Winick, left, accepted the Hall of Fame plaque on behalf of her grandmother, Dora Schwebel.

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out in the plant. For me, I'm an old woman."

Mrs. Schwebel even once had the honor of hosting Eleanor Roosevelt when she came to visit the company.

"(Dora was) a remarkable woman who never saw herself as remarkable, neither proud nor ashamed of her humble beginnings," Ms. Winick said. "This honor is something she would not have expected."

In 1964 she died at the age of 76, and the company has continued to expand ever since, growing the company into the premier wholesale baking company in the region. MBN