

Ray Thelen



During the long course of his career in baking, Ray Thelen devoted himself to baking science, committing nearly every waking hour to exploring and learning as much about baking as he could. His lasting legacy to the industry was not only the knowledge he gained and the discoveries he made

but also what he shared.

Mr. Thelen found his passion for baking as a young boy baking at home. At the age of 8 years old he entered the retail bake force, working for the Sunlight Bakery in his hometown of St. Cloud, Minn. Following his first experience in the baking industry, Mr. Thelen worked at other bakeries throughout his youth, including Cushman Bakery, Dinkel's Bakery and American Bakeries in Chicago. To complete his education Mr. Thelen entered the bakery program and experimental laboratory at the Dunwoody Institute. After his graduation, he joined The Pillsbury Co. in 1938.

From 1942 to 1945 Mr. Thelen served in the Navy in the Pacific theater. When he wasn't on gun patrol, he was in the ship's bakery, baking various sweet rolls reminiscent of home and kneading up to 100 loaves of bread a day for his fellow sailors. After the war, Mr. Thelen returned to Pillsbury where he was instrumental in establishing the mix division, aiding in the development of dry mixes such as Royal Viking Mix. Mr. Thelen also contributed to the development of three patents on laminated foods and co-authored many books under the Pillsbury Press, including a 1,428-page reference book,

“Conversion Factors for the Baking Industry.”

After several years at Pillsbury, Mr. Thelen started working for Wassell Bakery, which eventually became Mrs. Smith’s Bakery. Then, beginning with his job at Standard Bakeries, Mr. Thelen began traveling the country offering his expertise in the solution of production problems.

In 1966 Mr. Thelen continued his consulting work, joining Mother

he could always be counted on to provide common sense solutions and explanations for highly technical problems.

Throughout his career Mr. Thelen provided his services to the baking industry, whether through seminars sponsored by Mother Murphy’s or by offering his one-on-one expertise and advice to bakeries around the world. He was a 54-year member of the American Society of Baking, where he was an officer and an

ing back to his early work in retail baking. He taught classes at bakery institutions, such as the American Institute of Baking, as a guest lecturer and demonstrator.

In addition to his speaking and teaching engagements, Mr. Thelen wrote columns for numerous trade publications, including the “Ask Ray” column for *Bakers Helper*, starting in 1944. During this time he would travel all week, returning home on the weekends to write

his columns, which

his wife would then type out and send. He subsequently wrote for *Baking Industry* and *Bakery Production and Marketing* until 1998.

Mr. Thelen was known for his dedication to baking, even building a research bakery in his home in San Diego that allowed him to work around the clock. The night Mr.

Thelen died he insisted

on helping one last customer, in spite of his ill health. His daughter, Carol Thelen Paris, said that some of his last words were, “I don’t know which way I’m going, but I just hope there’s a bakery there.”

Over the many years he spent researching ingredients and techniques, Mr. Thelen developed his own library of formulas and solutions. This library, along with his many innovations, is his gift to the baking industry, and will be made available to future bakers seeking his expert advice.



Mr. Thelen demonstrates varieties and methods for bakers at Pillsbury Mills, 1955.

Murphy’s Laboratories and founding his own consulting business. At Mother Murphy’s, Mr. Thelen was regarded as the “go-to guy” when customers needed advice. Those who wanted to know whether or not a new ingredient would improve their product could rely on Mr. Thelen to conduct thorough tests and get back to them with his professional opinion. His specialties were new product development and ingredient functionality and

executive committee member. He also was a member of the Biscuit & Cracker Manufacturers Association, acting as its program chairman. During his time with these organizations he regularly presented technical papers.

Mr. Thelen also frequently participated in the educational programs of a variety of other bakery associations, including the Retail Bakers of America, for which he had a particular fondness, stem-