

## 2010 Baking Hall of Fame



**M. Rella Dwyer**

**A**s one of the few women with an established name in the baking industry, Rella Dwyer helped pave the way for women to be accepted in the industry.

Her career began as a baking technician in 1958, and over the years she was promoted to senior vice-president of production and research. She also served on various committees over the years, as chairman of the Food Technical Regulatory Affairs Committee for the American Bakers Association for more than 16 years. Through this role, she helped bring consensus positions on key legislative and regulatory policies impacting food labeling, food safety, nutrition and biotechnology. In addition, she spent time on the American Society of Baking's Scientific Advisory Committee.

"I was not afraid to speak up when I thought something was wrong," said Ms. Dwyer, who retired in March 2002 after a 44-year career with The Long Co., Chicago. "I spoke up, and I wasn't afraid to argue about certain things. Some I won and some I didn't."

She said through the years she finally saw women become accepted in the industry after years of often being the only woman at various industry meetings. When she went to the American Society of Bakery Engineers (now the American Society of Baking) conventions early on in her career, she said she was probably one of 20 or 30 women in a huge crowd of thousands of people and now significantly more women attend. She believes having a unique name helped people recognize her in the industry.

Overall, Ms. Dwyer's work helped set a precedent for women in the field of baking science and senior management within the baking industry. She was also a founding member of the Society of Bakery Women and enjoyed mentoring and encouraging students and seeing more women enter the field.

Her career began after she graduated from Mundelein College with a degree in home economics. She got a job as a test baker with The Long Co., began working her way up in the industry and enjoyed the variety the job entailed.

"I can honestly say in 44 years I never had two days

be alike," Ms. Dwyer said.

Ms. Dwyer's area of expertise quickly became regulations and informing others of changes in regulations. She said this started when her boss asked her to get a copy of *The Federal Register*, read it and report to him what it discussed. Because she did such a good job of reporting to everyone on regulatory issues, it simply became her responsibility over time to keep everyone up to date.

"Regulations were fierce," Ms. Dwyer said. "We had

meetings maybe every other month in Washington where we would have discussions amongst ourselves about what we thought of the nutrition regulations, the ingredient legends — all that was brand new. Because I was chairman of the group, I learned quite a lot."

She emphasized how much change the industry went through when nutrition labeling and ingredient legends were first required and how much these changes interested her. She said before they simply



Len Heflich, left, vice-president of quality systems at Bimbo Bakeries, M. Rella Dwyer and Lee Sanders, senior vice-president of government relations and public affairs at the American Bakers Association, at an A.B.A. Food Technical Regulatory Affairs Committee meeting that Ms. Dwyer chaired.

## 2010 Baking Hall of Fame



Gary Brodsky, center, presented Ms. Dwyer's award to Lee Sanders, left, and Theresa Cogswell, right.

made bread and that was it, and suddenly they had to put all of the nutrition information on the products. She said the company made a computer program to help with this and that she was in the right place at the right time to experience all of the changes.

"Still today, when discussions turn to government regulations and new laws, I find myself asking, 'What would Rella do,'" said Theresa Cogswell, president and owner of BakerCogs, Inc.

On top of her other pursuits, Ms. Dwyer was chair of the Milling and Baking Division in the AACC International and received multiple awards and has a scholarship award for undergraduate students in the field of milling and baking science named for her. Through the years she also became a featured speaker at various industry meetings.

"You never had to wonder where Rella was coming from or where she was going," Ms. Cogswell said. "She was painfully clear in her communication."

Ms. Cogswell said Ms. Dwyer worked hard on food safety while ensuring the government did not run the business.

The Long Co.'s Product Quality Trophies are even named for Ms. Dwyer. She said she saw The Long Co. grow during her time there due to its range of expertise in various areas, including production, engineering, marketing, advertising and accounting.

While there, Ms. Dwyer managed the bakery lab, including chemistry and product development aspects. She said one of the most interesting product development innovations during her career was fiber bread.

"I couldn't have done it without the crew I had," Ms. Dwyer said. "I couldn't have held all those positions I held and couldn't have been as active as I was."

Ms. Dwyer is known for her knowledge in nutrition policy, food safety, management strategy and strategic positioning.

"Some additional thoughts come to mind when I think of Rella — leader, teacher, pioneer, professional, determined, precise, polite and persistent, a true and great friend, always going that extra mile for the cause that she believed in and encouraging each of us to do the same," said Lee Sanders with the American Bakers Association. MBN



M. Rella Dwyer speaking at American Bakers Association

