

Cooking Up Connections Clabber Girl Emphasizes History, Community

It's simple, really.

By zeroing in on the strengths of its products and employees, keeping its history alive and engaging the community, Clabber Girl has been a leader in the baking goods industry for 161 years.

While President and COO Gary Morris acknowledges that those tactics have stayed virtually the same, there are some new developments and strategies the Terre Haute-based company has put into place to keep it moving forward.

"The nature of the food, the way we buy food and consume food has changed. Eleven years ago we were almost exclusively retail baking powder, but that whole category across the U.S. has been declining," he explains.

Now, Morris says, more consumers are buying pre-packaged food and making less from scratch – leaving the bulk of the baking powder sales to restaurants and industry instead of home-based markets. For the company, diversification is vital.

The baking powder that Herman Hulman first led the company to produce in 1879 (with several new formulas and names throughout the years until "Clabber Girl Baking Powder" was perfected in 1923) is just one of its many current offerings.

As America strives to become healthier, the food industry is working to give consumers some healthy alternatives. Morris is excited about how Clabber Girl will be able to assist its customers in making more nutritious food choices. It now offers a reduced-sodium baking powder and is focusing on whole wheat, gluten-free and sugar-free products as well.

"Awareness of the impact of your diet to your health is the highest it's ever been. There is a challenge in every segment of the food (industry), to try and come up with items that are natural, healthy (and with) not as many derivatives in them," he concedes. "That's going to continue and that's a good thing. This is a great time to be in the food business, because there are so many great opportunities."

In looking to the future, Morris remarks that remembering where Clabber Girl came from is an important piece of the company's success. That's why memorabilia is displayed in the Clabber Girl Museum.

"If it wasn't for the people that came before us, we wouldn't be here," he admits. "In the museum, you will see what it was like back in the 1800s: from 1850 to the turn of the century, to the acquisition of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (by the Hulman family), all the way up to today, where you can take a cooking class on gluten-free cooking."

The company's headquarters features a bakery with all products crafted in-house: "By producing those items ourselves, we have an understanding of how our customers use (the

products). It's personal for us; this is who we are. I can't think of anything more personal than what you consume," Morris reflects.

Community service is also a key part of Clabber Girl. Examples include cooking classes for cancer patients to learn how to remove ingredients that cause sensitivities; a children's summer cooking camp; making a large conference room available for non-profits; and the use of the company's parking lot for a farmers' market and several festivals throughout the year.

Morris also asserts that it hasn't been an easy ride with the recent recession, but he's nothing but positive about the company's next 100-plus years.

"We want to continue to grow the business. It's been challenging because of the economy for every business, an extreme challenge for everybody. It's just being flexible, having a committed staff and I have to say thanks to the Hulman family and board of directors. Without their support and commitment, we wouldn't have been able to accomplish everything we have," he concludes.

To view the January/February 2006 BizVoice® story on Clabber Girl, go to the archives section of www.bizvoicemagazine.com.

INFORMATION LINK

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Community involvement is a main ingredient for Clabber Girl. Culinary demonstrations during the Clabber Girl Country Christmas event are one way of reaching out. Children are encouraged to learn the basics of kitchen skills and baking by attending summer cooking camps.