



National Cigar Corporation Harvest Tradition Continues for 63 Years

Organization: National Cigar Corporation

Address: 407 N Main St., Frankfort

Telephone: (800) 321-0247

Web site: www.broadleafcigars.com

Leadership: James K. Pogue, president

History:

Built in 1917, the downtown Bankable Building has been home to cigar production since its inception. National Cigar Corporation's story began in 1943 when the Berger family purchased the site and launched a cigar business.

National Cigar is the Midwest's sole cigar manufacturer. Acquisitions of local manufacturers broadened its presence to include Ohio, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Southern Illinois, West Virginia, Oklahoma and Southern Kentucky.

The company's signature product is its broadleaf cigar. A Connecticut facility owned by the Berger family grows the majority of National Cigar's tobacco crops. All cigars are produced at the Frankfort plant, which employs about 25 people.

National Cigar sells approximately six million cigars per year via the Frankfort facility, mail order and various retailers.

One of the family:

A native of Frankfort, Pogue began his career at National Cigar not long after it was established in his hometown.

"I guess after 54 years, I am part of the family," he offers. "My name's (just) not the same."

"When I started, there were four brothers, and they were all active in the business," he recalls. "They're all deceased now, so I'm really about the only one left. There's a board of directors comprised of family members, but they're not active in the business."

NATIONAL CIGAR CORPORATION

A familial atmosphere and flexible schedules help compensate for the cigar industry's comparatively low salaries. Pogue notes, for example, that many employees who have pursued external career options returned to the company.

"It's amazing the ones we've had come back," he marvels. "They'll come back here where it's a little more leisure."

Timeless techniques:

Pogue travels to National Cigar's Connecticut plant a few times a year to interact with farmers and personally explore their tobacco fields.

"Financially, it's very lucrative (the Connecticut operation) because we sell it (broadleaf tobacco) to other manufacturers," he shares. "It's a pretty good money maker for us. We've had that operation up there since 1854."

"See, the Bergers got into the tobacco business long before they were in the cigar business," he adds, "so we've still got that facility."

According to Pogue, women have become key employees in the cigar manufacturing process.

"Years ago when all cigars were hand made, they were mostly men," he explains. "Then as they converted to machines, it gradually went over to probably 95% women."

Equipment used by National Cigar hasn't changed dramatically over the past 50 years. Although some machines are new, others have been enhanced to accelerate their speed.

Welcoming change:

According to Pogue, life in Frankfort hadn't changed much since his childhood until the Industrial Park's introduction.

"When I was a kid, about the only thing you had was the railroad," he states. "The big economic deal is out on West 28. All of those industries out there (such as Frito Lay and Federal-Mogul located in the Industrial Park area). That's been a big change."

National Cigar never has had to significantly adjust its operations to accommodate social and economic changes over the years. Fluctuations in cigar popularity, for instance, have never resulted in layoffs.

Continued on page 90



National Cigar employees are at work in the various stages of cigar production.



Member Spotlight

Continued from page 79

To each his own:

Among the company's large assortment of brands are Black Hawk Chiefs, El Verso, Evermore Original and Hauptmann Broadleaf.

"Everybody's got their certain taste," Pogue shares. "The thing of it is that the big companies, they want to produce in mass. We have 34 machines and we may be running anywhere from six to 10 on any day, but they're all different shapes and sizes and so forth."

Since a cigar's shape determines its taste, mixed sizes increase their appeal.

"You could put the same tobacco in a thin cigar and a bigger cigar, and they don't taste the same," Pogue says.

Teaching career? Close, but no cigar:

When Pogue earned his teaching degree from Purdue in the early 1950s, he reached a proverbial career crossroads.

"I didn't know what I was going to do," he shares, "so I thought it (working at National Cigar) would give me a few years of business experience."

More than 50 years later, Pogue has no regrets about the profession he chose.

"It's been very interesting," he comments. "It's been challenging. It's different than your nuts and bolts type of industry. You try to do what you've been successful at, because that's apparently what your customers like, and try to stay as close to that as possible. But those things aren't easy, so I guess that's what makes it interesting."

The unpredictable nature of tobacco crops – whether they become "good" or "bad" crops – poses challenges to cigar production. Pogue is confident that National Cigar will continue to overcome the hurdles.

"We'll keep going until everybody in the country goes smoke-free and we can't sell any cigars at all," he declares.