WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

1999

Charles Vignieri
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As chairman of Kenosha Beef International and Birchwood, Charles Vignieri has provided an important market for livestock producers of southeastern Wisconsin. He was a pioneer in promoting the concept of boxed beef during its early development - a procedure that is now used routinely throughout the industry to distribute beef. Thanks to his innovation and determination, his company is recognized as a leader in sanitation techniques and preparation of boxed beef. His modern and attractive plant is a key part of the local community.

Frank and Rosaria Vignieri, came to the United States from Italy in the 1920s, and became the parents of Charles, born in 1924 in Chicago. Frank and Rosaria became involved part-time in a veal purchase/slaughter/sell operation in Kenosha. In 1936, young Charles went into the meat business part-time with his father as Frank Vignieri and Son. While Charles was in the Army, Kenosha’s community slaughter house shut down. Frank acquired a 40-acre site west of Kenosha and converted a potato cellar to a slaughter floor. Today a modern plant is located on the site.

Just after World War II, Charles met and married Lorraine Vander Warn of Racine, Wisconsin. They produced a family that could have been publicized as a baseball team! Those nine children included Allan, Susan, Dennis, Richard, Patricia, Joseph, Thomas, Daniel and Mark. Today Charles and Lorraine have 20 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

The Vignieris continuously expanded and improved their packing facility through the 1950s and 1960s. Charles took over the business when his father died in 1960. Just previously in 1958, they had acquired two other companies. They were incorporated as Packers Outlet in 1961 and changed to Birchwood Meat and Provision Co. in 1965. Kenosha Packing Co. was incorporated in 1954, and reorganized as Kenosha Beef International Ltd. in 1976.

Today, subsidiaries of Kenosha Beef in Wisconsin, Ohio and Georgia supply fresh and frozen beef patties for the major fast food chains, and are the major supplier of precooked meat for Taco Bell. The company also exports frozen beef products to buyers impressed with Kenosha Beef’s reputation for quality and sanitation. This is yet another story of an immigrant family coming to the United States, starting a small business in Wisconsin and then seeing it grow to play a significant role in the proud heritage and progress of Wisconsin’s meat industry.