WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

2003

Ed Traisman
Meat Industry Hall of Fame inductee Ed Traisman earned his B.S. degree in chemistry from the University of Illinois in 1936. After working as a sugar chemist with American-Maize Products of Hammond, Indiana for 10 years, he joined Kraft Foods as a cheese products researcher. He served as a research manager at Kraft for nine years, until he learned about a new system of fast foods distribution — McDonalds.

In 1957 as Ed drove to and from his work at Kraft, he noticed a new drive-in restaurant in Des Plaines, called McDonalds. He could see lines of people waiting for service almost every time he passed. One day he stopped in to learn more about the restaurant. All employees seemed fully occupied, except for a middle-aged man sweeping the floor in the food preparation area. This man turned out to be Ray Kroc, and the ensuing discussion he had with the founder of this restaurant changed the course of Traisman’s life. Ray Kroc was a great salesman, and by the time Ed left the store, he was 90% certain he wanted to buy a franchise, but he wasn’t sure where he’d find the money. His wife was all for taking the plunge, and said she’d find a job if necessary to feed their small children. In 1958 Traisman brought the first McDonald’s franchise to Madison. He worked long hours improving his store, and was so successful that over the next 13 years he acquired four more McDonalds franchises in Madison and remained a technical consultant to the parent company. He strongly believed in McDonald’s basic concept of distributing safe, sanitary and nutritious food that consumers could obtain quickly at an affordable price, and that would be uniform in quality.

Traisman’s science background and business skills contributed significantly to the company’s success, and many of the innovations he introduced were adopted nationwide. He researched and developed a process to freeze partially-cooked French-fried potatoes, thus providing a uniformly high-quality product throughout the year. In Madison, he established the first “sit-down” McDonalds restaurant in the nation. He was the first franchise owner to recognize and encourage employment of women, and the first to hire mothers on a part-time basis while their children were in school.

In 1975 Traisman became the Senior Research Program Manager for the Food Research Institute (Department of Food Microbiology and Toxicology) at the UW-Madison. He was instrumental in helping fund FRI projects dealing with additives and contamination of meat products. One project showed that nitrite in cured meats was almost entirely modified into non-suspect compounds, and established nitrite’s crucial role in controlling botulism in temperature-abused cured meats. In 1987 he helped initiate research on E. coli 0157:H7, which was then a little-known pathogen, but already implicated in outbreaks of food-borne illness from ground beef. Following his semi-retirement in 1989, he has continued to edit the FRI’s quarterly research report.

For about 25 years Traisman guest-lectured UW-Madison seniors in Animal Science 405, “Livestock and Meat Distribution,” providing valuable insights into retail meat distribution via the fast-food industry.

Ed Traisman has been married to Dorothy for 41 years. He has five children from his two marriages (Claudia, Barbara, Steven, Jennifer and Lisa), seven grandchildren and two great
grandchildren. Ed Traisman is being honored for his significant role in Wisconsin’s meat industry, not only as a pioneer in retailing fast-food meat products, but also as one playing instrumental roles in meat safety and education.