WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME
1993

Frederick D. Usinger
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Frederick D. Usinger was born May 20, 1917 in Milwaukee, is married to Lois D. Usinger, and they have five children -- Karen, Barbara, Heidi, Debra and Fritz.

Frederick D. Usinger, grandson of the founder of Fred Usinger, Inc., is a rare individual. He has devoted himself to the growth and prosperity of the sausage-making business his grandfather founded in 1880. At the same time, he has also seen to it that the reputation of the company (America's premier sausage-maker) would serve to enhance the reputation of his hometown, Milwaukee, as well as the State of Wisconsin. This has been accomplished, because of Frederick's commitment to continue to make the best sausage that can be made -- adhering to the tradition of quality established by his grandfather and never deviating from that ideal.

He began working at the company on a part-time basis during the summer months in 1933, at the age of 16. He started, literally, at the bottom -- washing floors, moving meat, cleaning casings, hanging sausages in the smokehouse, and, later, trimming, stuffing and cooking, until, eventually, he was ready to handle the all-important operation of sausage mixing. Frederick began this way purposely, so that he would personally learn every step of the process of sausage making and would be able to oversee the entire operation in later years. At age 24, Frederick became plant superintendent; five years later, vice president. He also, for a time, "kept the books", and was actively involved in the office management of the company. In 1953, when he became president, he was also named a "Meister Wurstmacher" (Master Sausage-Maker). He still takes special pride in this title. While he was president, he continued to buy the spices and natural casings that go into making sausage.

After assuming the presidency, one of Frederick's first actions was to organize Usinger's packaging -- even to design some of the shipping cartons. It was his idea to make use of the company's now famous "sausage-making elves" on the labels, cartons, letterheads and advertising materials. The first "elf" became a registered trademark in 1956.

In 1954, Frederick originated the idea of sausage gift assortments -- long before other food marketers entered the field. From a humble beginning of just a few hundred boxes, the company's Christmas gift business has multiplied many times over and has become an integral part of its total volume. The gift box business is now, also, year 'round. These gift assortments have served to build priceless word-of-mouth advertising -- people who send them and people who receive them talk about them enthusiastically!

Over the years, since Frederick's assumption of the company presidency, the firm's annual production of sausage has more than doubled. More importantly, the superior quality of the product line has been maintained and is acknowledged as the best by both meat-industry peers and consumers. Feature articles in such prestigious magazines as The Saturday Evening Post, National Geographic and Esquire have brought national attention as have articles which have appeared in newspapers such as "The New York Times", "The Chicago Tribune" and "The Los Angeles Times".

He made sure that his son, Fritz, learned the business "from the bottom up", as he did -- working in the plant summer after summer. After Fritz graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May 1980 with a B.S. degree in Agriculture, majoring in Meat & Animal Science, he
still worked in the manufacturing plant. In June of 1988, Frederick handed the presidency of the company to Fritz and semi-retired with the title of Chairman of the Board. Frederick's youngest daughter, Debra, is also active in the firm, as Director of Retail Operations and Corporate Services. The other three daughters, while not currently active in the business, all worked in the retail store or office at one time or another.

Frederick Usinger remains a strong influence within the corporation, and his advice, suggestions and counsel are well respected. Because of him, Usinger's sausage is acknowledged and recognized throughout the country and the meat industry as a premier product -- one which stands for unequaled excellence. The company continues to prosper, providing steady employment for some 140 people, and looks toward the future with a successful eye based on family pride, tradition and uncompromising quality.