

# HOW IT ALL BEGAN, OVER 40 YEARS AGO...



**W**hen Elmer and I started this business over 40 years ago, we couldn't have imagined in our wildest dreams that the company would grow to this size. Elmer simply had a plan to give his children a business of their own—that was what he wanted to leave as his legacy. He had been a mechanical engineer for 29 years, but he had a wonderful business sense and he knew that he could start his own business. He clearly passed on that “can do” attitude to our children. He taught them well, and they listened. Before he passed, at only 57 years old, I asked him if he wanted to leave any advice or instructions about the business. But he said no, that Whitsons was in good hands and he was sure we would succeed.

We didn't have an initial plan to get into the food service business. Elmer looked at many different business opportunities. We settled on food because in our family, it was a big thing. Just feeding our family was a big job, and eventually we realized it was the right choice for us.

Now, after all these years, I know our entire Whitsons “family” feels good about providing a service that helps people in a very personal way. I appreciate that together, we have built a company whose team members genuinely get pleasure from serving our customers and making them feel happy and satisfied.

When we first started, it was just our three oldest sons, Bill, Doug and Bob, who worked full-time at the Bon Bon in Garden City. They had all graduated from college and worked in other businesses, but they liked their dad's idea of starting a business and working with each other. The others all helped out too, and as each of our children graduated college, they expanded their roles in the company to full-time, and it's worked incredibly well for them. I am so proud of what they have accomplished together.

Everyone worked long, hard hours in the beginning. I baked a lot of cakes and pies for the shops in those days. But nobody seemed to mind, because we were building something. We moved into food service management, serving the Traveler's Insurance Company. They relocated a few years later, and then the AAA moved in, and the business just grew and grew from there. Now with close to 3000 team members and over \$200 million in sales, I'm not quite sure this was ever what Elmer had expected; I don't think he had foreseen how many others would become involved, or the depth of success we would experience—though he would never have doubted it.

There is nothing more joyful for me than to come to work every day to see my children and our extended family of team members, successfully working together. That was one of the reasons Elmer wanted to start the business, to keep our family together, and I am so happy that it worked. As fortunate as we've been, I can't say I was ever surprised. I know that their father would be extremely proud of them. I'm sure he's in Heaven smiling down at them—and at you.

Our gratitude goes out to all of you, for your years of support, hard work and brilliant ideas that have helped to shape our company. Without each one of you, whatever your role may be, we would not be the company that we are today. So on behalf of Elmer, myself and the entire Whitcomb family, thank you for so many wonderful years. May the future be just as successful. ■