

CDA's 2022 Dean of the Industry: Bill Henry, Kellogg Co.

Right: Henry
with BIC's Pat
Cordle.



As he prepares for his retirement after a 37-year career with Kellogg Co., the association and industry colleagues honor Bill Henry.

BY LISA WHITE



Left: Henry with Nick Zaden,
City Wholesale Grocery Co.,
Inc. and wife Marilyn Zaden.



While some who have a strong work ethic are competitive to a fault, Bill Henry is known as a hard worker that has both his company's and his customer's best interests at heart.

This quality has been the hallmark of his impressive career at Kellogg Co. and Keebler Foods Co. for almost four decades.

An Orlando, FL native, Henry attributes his dedication and drive to his father, who worked as a sales manager for a family-owned bakery in Tarpon Springs.

"I worked in the bakery while in high school and ran routes when I received my driver's license at 16," he said. "After high school, I left the family bakery to join American Bakeries, a national fresh bread and cake



Henry catches up with colleagues at an industry event.



2014 CDBX (formerly known as AWMA Summit & ABX); (left to right); Nick Zaden, City Wholesale Grocery Co., Inc.; Bill Henry; John Scardina, C.A. Carlin; Steve Shing, retired (formerly with Grocery Supply Co.).



2018 Marketplace (left to right); Travis Motsinger, Reynolds; Scott Hill, Jack Link's Protein Snacks; Doug Hynek, Reynolds; Jon Burklund, Burklund Distributors, Inc.; Bill Henry.

company. I excelled running a bread route and several promotions later, opportunity came knocking.

It was 1985 when Henry was approached by Keebler; the company was starting DSD for small format stores in Birmingham, AL. He was tasked with expanding the company's route sales for these retailers in the mid-South.

Henry was promoted five years later to the corporate office and moved his family to Chicago. His responsibilities expanded to all aspects of Keebler's route sales business from an operations standpoint. Henry then moved into several layers of route sales management, before becoming director/general manager. During this time, he moved from Birmingham to Chicago to Houston and back to Chicago, all the while taking on more responsibilities.

"It was 1996 when the turning point in my career occurred," he said. "This is when Keebler got rid of its route sales system for small format, so my last responsibilities were cleaning up and getting back all assets from 700 routes through 28 states. Someone came to me from leadership and asked about wholesale delivery and DSD distributors; I thought it was a great idea as I will always take the bird in the hand."

At this time, Henry was living in Chicago with great friends but no business connections other than at Keebler, so he jumped at the opportunity. He remained in Chicago until 2000 and moved his family back to Florida, landing in Lakeland, where he met his wife Kim 19 years earlier.

Big Achievements

Being on a route truck since the age of six working alongside his father, Henry learned early on how to deal with customers.

"I knew how to conduct myself in retail outlets, what to do and where to park my vehicle, everything from A to Z my father taught me in the DSD side of the business," he said.

This prepared Henry to build Keebler's DSD in the mid-South and later developed a distributor network with independent route systems spread across the country in 1996.

"In 1998, I was promoted and became director and general manager for the eastern U.S. for convenient, drug and dollar with a heavy focus on warehouse delivery," he said. "It was then when I was exposed to [what was then the American Wholesale Marketers Association] before it was CDA."

When Kellogg Co. purchased Keebler in 2001, Henry became national account director for c-stores for wholesale delivery while merging two business, Kellogg and Keebler, into one cohesive team.

"It took me 15 years to get back after leaving Florida, and I had no intention of leaving again," he said.

From 2001 to 2022, the company went through several reorganizations, and Henry became Kellogg's senior director for national accounts before landing his most recent role as senior director of sales Small Format.

He counts among his biggest achievements entering route sales in the DSD world early on in his career, as he was a big part of the company's expansion.

"It started as a test, where Keebler had 12 routes here in Florida. The expansion started when I came on board," he recalls. "We added routes across southern tier states and through the Midwest, markets selected by Keebler leadership. This eventually encompassed 28 states and more than 700 route trucks."

Henry received several accolades along the way, including being named Keebler's Manager of the Year in 1988, 1989 and 1990. In 1996, he won the company's first annual President's Award, bestowed on him by the new leadership team.

"I was getting a cocktail in the lobby during Keebler's annual sales meeting when they announced the award," he said. "It was a big surprise."

Along with his illustrious career, Henry has been a strong supporter of CDA. He first became involved with the



CDBX 2018 (left to right): Chris Jones, Andalusia Distributing Co., Inc.; Ricky Jones, Andalusia Distributing Co., Inc.; Bill Henry; Sid Thrash, Andalusia Distributing Co., Inc.



CDBX 2021: Bill Henry and his Kellogg Co. team meet with Jack Parker, The Corr-Williams Co.

association in the late 90s, then served on the Warehouse Delivered Snack Committee from its beginning in the late 90s to its disbandment in 2018. He was part of CDA's Board of Directors from 2018 to 2021 and the Education & Research Committee from 2018 to the present. Henry also served on the National Association of Convenience Stores' (NACS) supplier board from 2005–2008 and is currently a part of its Political Action Committee. In addition, he was a member of the National Confectioner's Association's (NCA) Sweets & Snacks Expo committee from 2010 to 2020.

Business Philosophy

Staring his career right out of high school, Henry said it was ingrained in him to go to work every day and do the best that he could at all times. "It wasn't about getting awards," he said.

And he insists that initially it wasn't about the money. "When I received my first major promotion at Keebler, I was in the company's corporate offices with the vice president of our business unit. He offered me a job where I'd be relocating to Chicago and asked how much I was making. When I could only give him a range, he was floored."

This was because Henry's wife, who was an accounting major in college, took care of the couple's finances.

"This freed me to go out and sell to the convenience industry without any concerns, so I didn't know exactly what I was making at the time," Henry said. "Money was never a motivator; it was about doing the best work I could, pleasing customers and bringing solutions to the table."

Henry describes himself as always being a student of the business.

"I've learned from a lot of folks, and you never stop learning," he said. "Sometimes you learn what not to do, but I was always looking at others, including customers and stores, to see what the takeaways were."

What sets Henry apart is that, despite a strong drive, he is always looking out for the customer.

"When I first started in this business, the category management process hadn't been invented yet. The objective when calling on c-store chains was how much food you could sell to the store. It was all about driving your own sales and dominating the sets," he recalls. "I remember my first meeting with a retailer talking about the category management approach. Nabisco was Keebler's main competitor, and I was telling this retailer that he needed another facing of Oreos on the shelf. It was difficult, but it was about having the best assortment and not just your assortment; it was a category management approach rather than the exclusivity approach. Over the last 40 to 50 years, there have been many changes in the approach to our business, but my main emphasis was learning from others, including customers and competitors."

Henry admits that when he first entered the wholesale side of the business, he didn't have a clue what he was doing, as he was always involved in DSD.

"It's a different approach or flow to the business; with DSD, you control from start to finish. But with wholesalers, it's a three-legged stool that includes the manufacturer, wholesaler and retailer," he said. "Many CDA members were patient in teaching me to be a good supplier, including Nick Zaden, Jon Burklund and Sherwin Herring. There is a whole list of folks who helped me succeed in this business. That's the great thing about this industry; people are willing to help you if you're open to it."

Henry notes that he's proud of never running from controversy or problems, but instead addresses them quickly.

"I am always looking for a positive solution, as there is always a win-win if you look hard enough," he said. "Don't delay or ignore issues but instead be prompt in addressing them."

This school of thought served him well in 1996, when Henry became involved with the industry relations side of his responsibilities. He describes it as an education in the line of fire.

“Half the battle is showing up, so I’d show up early and stay late at events,” he said. “It’s important to be visible. I’ve seen sales reps sit in the back of the booth at a trade show and wait for people to engage them. In sales, when convincing people of ideas or products, you have to outline what their opportunity is. They may not be thinking of your category or products or company so you need to bring forward what they should be thinking about. You have to be proactive with customers. Be in tune with the marketplace and take advantage of learning opportunities and resources available like CDA, NACS and customer education sessions. Be involved with distributor sessions and retailer resources. These are elective and not required but all you have to do is show up and leverage or take advantage of opportunities.”

Colleague Accolades

Those who have worked with Henry sing the praises of a man who is much deserving of CDA’s Dean of the Industry honor.

“I have known Bill for many years, as we grew up in the industry together,” said Ricky Jones, president of Andalusia Distributing Co. Inc., Andalusia, AL. “He is a positive and energetic person who brings his company to every conversation you have with him. I had the opportunity to attend the Kentucky Derby with Bill. He is just as genuine in a social environment as he is in a business situation. Bill is a true Dean of the Industry and the distributor’s kind of guy. He is always looking for an opportunity to help us succeed.”

Susie Douglas Munson, chief operating officer of the Douglas Cos., Conway, AR, said during her early years in the convenience industry, Henry was one of the first vendors who made extra efforts to make her feel welcomed and helped educate Munson on the industry and the importance of the distributor’s role in the supply chain.

“Bill has been such a HUGE supporter and proponent of the distributor community with the giving of his time, input and energy on many industry committees and boards over the years and helped lead CDA’s Warehouse Delivered Snacks Committee for many years, helping us all define and articulate our important role in the convenience supply chain,” she said. “I have been fortunate enough to serve with Bill on several of these organizations and always learn from him; he listens and makes thoughtful contributions to conversations....always wanting to understand the viewpoint of the distributor. Coming from his days on the Keebler sales route, Bill possesses a keen insight to doing business at retail on the street and understands the importance of knowing your customer and providing great customer service. His experience with sales on the Keebler sales route, working



2019 CDBX, Bill Henry and his team.

alongside the distributor community and representing Keebler/Kellogg sets Bill apart because he truly has an understanding of all three roles and their relation to the end consumer. I can think of no one more deserving than Bill Henry for this award as he truly is a Dean of the Industry and held in the highest respect and regard by his peers for his knowledge and integrity.”

Scott McPherson, president and CEO of Core-Mark International, Westlake, TX, said he has found Henry to be a true professional. “He has a strong reputation in our company as being fair, kind and a good business man. I think Bill is a great candidate for this honor,” he said.

“Bill has exemplified tireless work for our industry,” said Thomas Wake, president of Core-Mark Eby-Brown Co., based in Naperville, IL. “Beyond his day job, his support of broader category management for the benefit of convenience retailers and the wholesale supplier network was unrelenting. Bill’s ability to bring people together and forge strong friendships and bonds in the many networking opportunities demonstrated his superior leadership skills. The time and effort necessary to build our collective businesses take many of us on the road away from family for extended periods and key days we’d like to be home. I personally know Bill is a true self-sacrificing road warrior and champion of our industry.”

Dan Willows, vice president of procurement and category management for Lacey, WA-based Harbor Wholesale has known Henry for four years. “He has had a tremendous impact and influence on the c-store channel by bringing tremendous innovation and insight to the snacking category. His leadership at Kellogg’s and his connection with our executive team at Harbor has helped us envision what a robust future will look like for independent c-store retailers. He is a tremendous person, great friend and well-deserving of this industry honor!”

At 66 years young, Henry plans to retire from Kellogg at the end of this year to spend more time with his family, including his wife of 39 years Kim, son Alex and daughter Megan, who are both expecting babies in the fall. “My son owns a bait and tackle shop, and I’ll be the early guy, selling bait to the customer on their way to the lake,” he said. **CD**