

## Lakeside has served millions for 125 years

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CHARLIE MATHEWS - Herald Times Reporter, Manitowoc - Associated Press

When Albert Landreth canned his first peas back in 1887, he probably didn't imagine that 125 years later Lakeside Foods would debut three new canned corn offerings — jalapeno, chipotle and Baja California.

The Manitowoc company has come a long ways since Landreth began his operation out of the kitchen of a small hotel on what is now Jay Street in downtown Manitowoc, a long stone's throw away from Lake Michigan.

Lakeside has annual gross sales of about \$500 million, operates plants and distribution centers in several states, produces canned and frozen vegetables and other food products for customers across America and overseas and employs during peak season about 2,600 men and women.

Employees include Donna Nagel, 73, "Customer Service Manager-Canned," who told the Herald Times Reporter of Manitowoc ( <http://htrne.ws/LNYUhb> ) she likes the new spicy corn varieties, which company officials said tend to be popular with younger consumers. "I also like our dry bean products and our super sweet whole kernel corn."

With 55 years of service, Nagel won't say when she's going to retire. "I like everybody who works here and Lakeside is part of my family, said the woman who joined the company when World War II hero Dwight Eisenhower was president.

"When people come here to work, they tend to stay," said Dave Yanda, president and chief executive officer, whose first day on the job at Lakeside Foods was 37 years ago. "We're proud of our culture here ... I believe we have something special."

It is the method of doing business and treating employees that has expanded into plants purchased in the past decade from other companies as Lakeside Foods has grown. "They say the 'Lakeside Way' is better" than what they were used to, said Jim Ferguson-senior vice president-Customer Services.

Ultimately, what Lakeside Foods strives to have is the ability to create high-quality food offerings — which have expanded far beyond its core items of peas, beans and corn — for its private label customers.

Millions of customers won't find "Lakeside" on the can label or printed on the frozen vegetable bag ... but will see the name marketed by its grocery store chain customers including, in Wisconsin, Aldi, Piggly Wiggly, Roundy's, Save A Lot, SUPERVALU, Walmart and others.

Lakeside Foods products also are distributed through Sysco, Reinhart, Performance Food Group and others to restaurants and other institutions nationwide. When

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students across the nation eat carrots, peas, corn, green beans and potatoes the vegetables may very well have come from one of Lakeside's 15 plants and six distribution centers.

"Lakeside and our industry have done a fantastic job providing value for the consumer for years," Yanda said of the company with about 60 shareholders that is one of America's two largest full-line suppliers.

He said, as a privately-held company, management can recommend and have shareholders endorse new acquisitions and strategies without worrying what stock analysts might think if Lakeside was a public company.

Bruce Jacobson, vice president-Operations said Lakeside is looking for additional seasonal workers this summer and Tom Reilly, senior vice president-Human Resources, said new and continuing employees go through an effective and comprehensive online training program.

"Steamable Sweet Corn" stand-up pouches is one of many products developed by Lakeside with its private label customers to change with the times, in terms of what consumers want to eat and how it is prepared.

"We've invested heavily in marketing data to better understand what our customers are looking for," said Joe Yanda, vice president-Retail Processed Food Sales and son of the company's president-CEO.

Joe Yanda said Lakeside has a team focused on innovation and new product development identifying, for example, expanding "flavor profiles" to prompt expansion of products like the spicy corn varieties.

Innovation can also be something as seemingly simple as having the vegetables coming in pop-top cans. Company officials said a survey showed many adults under age 25 don't have a can opener in their homes or apartments.

And when it comes to what is in the can or bag, "Some of our larger customers are coming out with new things" that even the brand labels haven't done ... "taking more pride in their store brand program," Dave Yanda said.

He said a trade magazine for private labels has surveyed the industry and Lakeside has again been judged No. 1 in frozen and canned vegetables.

Bob Pople, vice president-Food Service Industrial Sales, said many Lakeside customers have scorecards tracking on-time delivery and other factors that demonstrate the Manitowoc firm's service and quality to be the best.

Denise Kitzerow, chief financial officer, noted Lakeside also offers its vegetable products, always low in fat, in low- and no-sodium varieties and are naturally gluten-free.

A mostly hot and dry summer is of concern to Lakeside officials. "We know our costs

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will go up with less product to run through our plants," Dave Yanda said of reduced yields from the acres that are planted and harvested by Lakeside employees or those of its contract farmers.

But no matter the volume of green beans coming via trucks east on Franklin Street to the downtown Manitowoc plant this summer, the process will be the same, as explained by Becky Eernisse, plant manager, and Joe Holschbach, operations manager.

The semi-loads of green beans, carrots to come in fall, are offloaded onto conveyor belts that take the vegetables from the outside, passing through a "dirt reel," to inside the plant for multiple washings, snipping, cutting, grading and blanching, which kills any bacteria pre-canning or pre-freezing.

Green beans are cooked at 246 degrees or 16 minutes before lids are applied or also work their way through mammoth chillers that result, seven minutes later, in frozen beans put into 1,340-pound totes taken via refrigerated trucks to the the Manitowoc distribution center on 30th Street.

Aided by laser technology that identifies and eliminates, via air guns, shooting any material off the conveyor belts not fit for canning or freezer bags, inspectors also manually remove green beans not up to Lakeside's standards.

When trucks of vegetables do arrive at the distribution center three miles west, just north of Dewey Street, Verlyn Robinson may be the fork lift driver who will be moving palettes around.

"It's always different every day, never boring," said Robinson, who will celebrate 50 years with Lakeside on Aug. 1.

"I see different (truck) drivers from all over the U.S. and Canada," Robinson said. "If you want to get loaded ... or unloaded ... you need to be a Packers fan," he joked.

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