



## **A recipe for success leads to great sausage**

By Jim Waters

As a kid, I sang along with the “Bob Evans, down on the farm” television commercial jingle while the company’s namesake wore his famous Stetson and string tie.

Evans, an American Icon, died last week. He epitomized the can-do spirit that makes America a great country.

Evans was Ohio’s version of Colonel Harland Sanders, Kentucky’s master of fried chicken. While the process of making sausage – or chicken – might temper the appetite, few argue with the end results.

But Evans’ life wasn’t just about the sausage, a point obviously lost on the smart aleck who asked on a message board about Evans: “Who cares about some sausage guy?”

Rather, Evans recognized what made America great.

It’s not just the things we produce that make ours a great country. But it’s about the producers. It’s about the freedom to dream and then work hard to make those dreams a reality.

Evans and Sanders could have made it big selling widgets. Their ingenuity, perseverance and willingness to take risks resulted in vision that spawned mind-boggling prosperity. Anyone, for example, who bought 1,000 shares of Bob Evans Farms Inc. at \$9 a share when the company went public in 1963 would have enough to buy the farm today – more than \$2 million.

It all started when Evans couldn’t find good sausage to feed truckers who stopped into his 12-stool truck stop he started following World War II near Gallipolis, Ohio. But he figured out the problem: Most companies used hog scraps to make their sausage.

So Evans took \$1,000, a couple of hogs, 40 pounds of black pepper and 50 pounds of sage and made his own sausage. But instead of using the scrap, he used the best parts of the hog.

People came from near and far to enjoy the succulent sausage. Customers provided the “research” while Evans and five friends and relatives provided the “development.”

“You might say the truck drivers did my research for me,” Evans would say. “They would tell me that this was the best sausage they ever had and then buy 10-pound tubs to take home.”

The end result was a company that generated \$1.6 billion in sales last year.

Times were simpler during the 1950s when the Evans saga began. Today, the health department would crack down on someone peddling freshly ground sausage from the back of a pickup truck like Evans did when mom-and-pop stores started ordering.

Still, even with some of the stifling tax-and-regulatory policies endorsed by legislators in Frankfort, Kentucky entrepreneurs remain willing to “go that extra mile that failures refuse to travel,” as cosmetics icon Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Inc., observed.

We need more of them.

Kentucky needs more visionaries like Lowell Guthrie, who dreamed of developing “a world-class, quality-focused die cast operation” when he left Ford Motor Company a quarter-century ago.

The foresight of Guthrie and seven of his initial investors – all former Ford employees – led to Trace Die Cast Inc. in Bowling Green. Trace projects sales of \$125 million worth of its die castings to automakers this year – only 19 years after opening.

Guthrie saw in the auto industry what Bob Evans saw down on the farm and what Sanders saw in his new pressure cooker a half-century ago.

All risked much to make it happen.

“We sold our house — pretty much sold everything except the furniture,” Guthrie said. “But that’s what it means to be an entrepreneur. By definition, an entrepreneur creates something out of nothing; the risk – that goes along with it.”

Then again, who cares about some die-casting guy?

The 550 people who make up Trace’s hourly workforce, that’s who.

The hope for a great future for Kentucky doesn’t hinge on some government program or political ploy. It lives in people like Guthrie, Evans and countless others for whom nothing seems impossible. These kinds of people shun the voices that say, “It can’t be done.”

They relentlessly pursue the American dream until it becomes a reality for themselves and many others. They make it happen.

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