

2010 Baking Hall of Fame



Charles E. Burford

He's just one of those people who always says, 'There's got to be a better way of doing that!'

That is how the current president of Burford Corp. summarizes what makes Charles E. Burford, the company's founder, extraordinary.

Mr. Burford was named to the 2010 class of the Baking Hall of Fame in the equipment category. The company was established by Mr. Burford and his father in 1961 with the invention of the Burford twist tie machine that helped revolutionize how bread and other baked foods are packaged.

In the years since, the company's equipment line has broadened considerably with a wide range of specialty devices that help bakers operate more efficiently. The company holds many patents for its innovations.

"Charles sees the world differently than the rest of us," said Fred Springer, who has been president of Burford since Mr. Burford's retirement in 2003. "It doesn't matter where he is. I can remember riding in an elevator with him when he turned to me and said, 'This could be designed so much more efficiently.' It's truly a matter of how he sees the world."

A native of Lindsay, Okla., Mr. Burford grew up on a farm and went straight to work for his father after graduating from high school. His father, Earl E. Burford, invented an automatic wire tying hay baler.

It was this invention that ultimately led to the creation of the twist tie machine. An entrepreneur working on polyethylene bags for bread approached the Burfords and asked whether the same principle used for the hay baler could be applied to sealing a plastic bread bag.

"That's where it got started," Mr. Springer said. "Earl and Charles listened to the proposal and said, 'Yeah, we can do that.'"

"Charles went to Colorado, to a town well known for wire work. There he was told they could machine a thin enough gauge wire to close a bread bag. Then he went to California and met with a company that said they could extrude plastic around the wire. Samples were run and it worked."

Mr. Burford later recalled that the entire process of developing the twist tie system took fewer than 30 days. The machine was modeled closely after the wire tying hay baler.

"At our plant we have a knotter assembly for the hay

baler," Mr. Springer said. "The assembler for twist ties looks just like it, a miniature version."

The twist tie offered consumers the advantage of being able to reseal bread packages.

For bakers, the advantage was efficiency.

"An automatic bagger runs much faster than overwrap," Mr. Springer said. "It's much less expensive to use a polyethylene bag."

The new technology was rapidly adopted. The Burfords opened a manufacturing facility in Maysville, Okla., a few miles from Lindsey, where the family owned additional farmland.

Throughout the early 1960s, Burford received hundreds of orders per year for the new device. Earl Burford and Charles Burford remained partners until the elder Mr. Burford's death in 1968.

Over the years, the twist tie machine has evolved to become faster and more automated. Newer machines are capable of sealing more than 100 packages per minute, nearly twice the volume of earlier machines.

Burford broadened its equipment line considerably in the 1980s with the acquisition of a baking equipment



From left, Britt and Beth Langford, Charles Burford, and Lisa and Richard Fullington. Ms. Langford and Ms. Fullington are Mr. Burford's daughters.

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John Del Campo, left, along with Gary Brodsky presented the award to Charles Burford.

line made by Clayton Industries based in Corpus Christi, Texas.

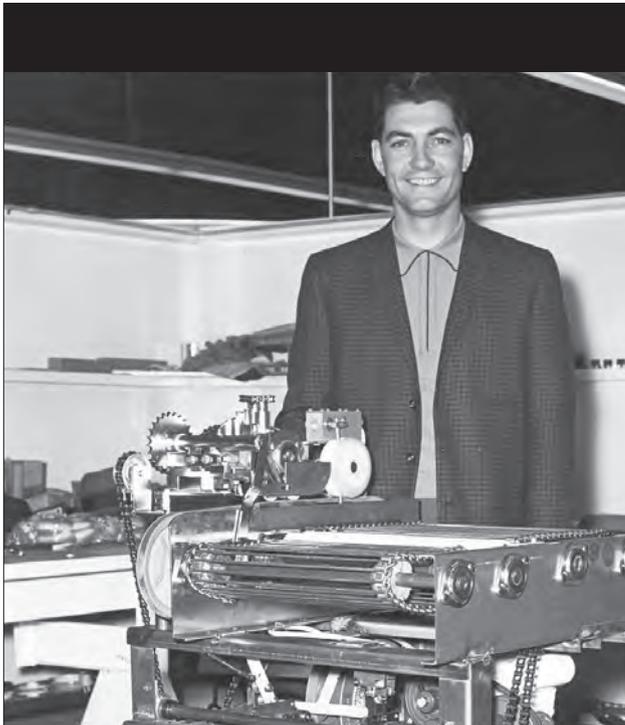
"Clayton had a great lineup of products that weren't too well made," Mr. Springer said. "They sold pretty well because no one else was making them. Charles said, 'Let's buy the entire line. I will redesign all of it, and we'll have really good product.' That's exactly what happened."

Four years after acquiring the line, the first new products were unveiled at the 1985 Baking Expo, a pan oiler, which greases pans before dough is deposited, and a bun seeder. Both have been highly successful.

The pan oiler reduced the amount of oil used to 15 oz per 1,000 cavities from the 60-80 oz, which was the standard at the time. For the topping applicator, Mr. Burford drew his inspiration from precision alfalfa planting machines.

Mr. Springer recalled that one major baking company quickly placed an order to place the pan oiler in each of the company's bread plants because of the savings.

"The same thing applies to the seeders," he said. "Most of the ones we sell pay for themselves within nine months."



Charles Burford

Mr. Burford's inventiveness extended beyond the baking industry. During the 1970s he developed a downstroke baler for the supermarket and dime store industry. The size of a side-by-side refrigerator-freezer, the device compacts cardboard boxes into a bale, wires them and loads the bale onto a dolly.

He also conceived a new packaging approach for growers of citrus fruits.

As is the case with any inventor, not everything Mr. Burford developed caught on. Mr. Springer said certain devices were ahead of their time. Others were more expensive than

customers wanted to spend.

"In the end, Charles has had far more successes than failures," Mr. Springer said.

In accepting the award at the annual meeting of the American Society of Bakers, Mr. Burford was modest, describing himself as "a farm kid from Oklahoma" and saying that he and his father were just "trying to help a bakery customer who had a problem closing bags."

Mr. Burford also paid tribute to the baking industry and the trust implicit with doing business with bakers.

"When I first got involved in this industry, there were no purchase orders," he said. "It was all verbal, either in person or by telephone."

"The only thing that has changed since then is the amount of paperwork that we all have to do. You know, our word is our bond. That's what made the no-paper system work. If a baker told you something, you could hang your hat on it forever. I grew up that way, too. It made the relationships quite comfortable." MBN



Charles Burford speaking at the Hall of Fame ceremony.