

# Fort Worth, Texas

The City's Magazine

June 2010

## DADDY'S GIRLS

In this Father's Day month, we visit four businesses where daughters are following in their fathers' footsteps. They represent 212 years of operation and are defying the odds that only 40 percent of family owned businesses survive to the second generation, 12 percent to the third, and 3 percent to the fourth. Three are already well into the third generation. And all are talking about the next generation.

by Gail Bennison

**Becky Renfro Borbolla's first childhood memory was at age 4, playing hide and seek behind the pallets and cases at her grandparents' family business and eating Renfro's signature Dixieland Chow Chow by the spoonful.** By sixth grade, Becky was chopping tomatoes with the ladies who worked in production during her school summer vacations.

She is very proud of how her family business came to be.

Equipped with an eighth grade education, a panel truck, and against many odds, her grandfather, George Renfro quit a job selling

restaurant supplies and condiments. In 1940, on the heels of the Great Depression, he and his wife Arthurine, co-founded George Renfro Food Co. in the garage of their north Fort Worth home.

The family business has not only survived, but thrived for 70 years through three generations of Renfros.

Today, second generation, Jack and Bill, and third generation, Doug, Becky and James, are active in the day-to-day operations. From humble beginnings as a food distribution company, Renfro Foods of Fort Worth and its Mrs. Renfro's label, now include more than 29 salsas, sauces and relishes sold at supermarkets, gourmet and gift shops and fruit and vegetable stands in all 50 states, Canada and the Caribbean. The company employs 40 people.

"My grandmother thought my grandfather was nuts to leave his job and open a business," says Becky, Renfro's vice president. "But even though it was tough in those days, she worked right alongside him. The old company panel truck was also their personal vehicle. I used to wonder how my grandmother worked so hard and still managed to cook full meals for her family every

day. They both had a very powerful work ethic."

The work ethic was passed to Becky's father, Bill, who worked in the family business after school growing up, and full-time after graduating from TCU. In 1972, the business was incorporated, and Bill and his brother were given stock ownership in the company. With his father's death in 1975, Bill, his mother, and brother, Jack, were left to lead the company into a phenomenal growth period.

Bill's parents taught him a work ethic, he says, but also honesty, a value that he has taught his daughter. "My dad was straight across," he says. "He taught me not to worry about competition, but to take care of your own product."

"Growing up, I never really thought there would be a place for me in our business," Becky says. She worked in the Moncrief Oil Co.'s Land Department for four years before her dad asked her to join the business in 1985. And he didn't make it easy, she says.

"I started at the bottom, first learning how the office ran, and later, learning to drive a forklift and load pallets, and the process of shipping and receiving" she said. "I can drive a forklift, but I don't want to!"

Bill says the transition to Renfro's third generation has been relatively easy.

As for working together as a father and daughter team, Becky says candidly that there are days she loves it and days when she's frustrated. "We're pushing for the second generation to retire," she said. "But then, I would miss seeing him every day. And I don't see Dad actually retiring."

Says Bill: "If I need to talk to my daughter about something I think she ought to be doing differently, it makes it a little difficult because she's my daughter. Other than that, it works very well. The third generation is a time when most family businesses fail. I think that a big part of our success is that we sit down and talk things out. Our disagreements have been few and far between and nothing serious. We've never put a motion to a vote except to adjourn."

### A SPICY COMBINATION

#### RENFRO FOODS, INC.

Fort Worth

**Father:** Bill Renfro

**Daughter:** Becky Renfro Borbolla

*As a community-minded company, Renfro Foods launched its Pink Lid Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign in 2007. Six of its top-selling salsas were refitted with pink lids and new labels. Portions of the sales are given to organizations and institutions involved in cancer research. To date, the company has donated \$45,000 to cancer research.*



