

Special Award - *Rising to the Top* Baker's Quality Pizza Crusts

We know that successful family businesses have a strong commitment to quality employees, product and process. They learn to adapt to changing trends and customer needs and preferences. They innovate. And they treat their workforce like family, with respect and generosity. So in these ways, the owners of Baker's Quality Pizza Crusts fit the mold. But in many other ways, this company breaks the mold.

It began in the 1960s, when Bill and Sue Miller opened a franchised chain of pizza restaurants in the Milwaukee area. They gained efficiencies by operating a central commissary to supply food ingredients and other products to the restaurants. Later on, the next generation, Tom and Pat Miller, grew the commissary into a regional distribution company but sold it in 1997, only retaining the pizza crust manufacturing portion of the business. They named the business Baker's Quality Pizza Crusts.

The Millers believe that good food is free of preservatives, chemicals and additives, and they maintain that ideal in their products. They believe this differentiates their pizza crusts from the competition and creates a loyal customer base. They are the only pizza crust manufacturer in the Midwest that still uses a hands-on approach for much of the process, rather than converting entirely to mechanical production. They offer a variety of frozen crusts, flatbreads and dough balls.

While the company has grown ten-fold over the past twenty years, growth is controlled and deliberate. They never let one customer represent more than 10 percent of the business. This allows the company to finance all growth internally, offering flexibility in the event of a sales or financial downturn.

The Millers are committed to their 30 employees. They have never laid off an employee and they provide full 40-hour work weeks and excellent benefits. In the off season, they pay employees to volunteer in the community. They have provided work-shadowing opportunities for cognitively disabled people and have made jobs for incarcerated men, some of whom have become permanent employees upon their release.

A third generation, Chris and Anne, are now stakeholders in the company. Growing up in the family business, they understood what it was all about, but their parents required them to complete their education and gain work experience outside the company for several years before they could formally join the organization. When they did come back to Baker's Quality, they started at the bottom and learned everything from production to administration before taking on management duties.

The judges were impressed by this company's diverse and dedicated workforce, commitment to a quality product, and its community involvement.

This Special Award titled "Rising to the Top" goes to Baker's Quality Pizza Crusts, Inc., of Waukesha, Wisconsin.

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