

Jiffy Mix And Its Rich Washtenaw County History

By [Jorge Avellan](#) • 6/12/2018

To many, Jiffy Mix is a household name. Many of you probably have it in your pantry right now. From the corn muffin mix, to pizzas, pastries, and pies. Jiffy Mix is based in Washtenaw County and is well-known for its mixes that cut down on time and effort in the cooking process. In fact, the company name comes from the adage, "It'll be done in a Jiffy." 89.1 WEMU's Jorge Avellan paid a visit to the Jiffy Mix facility in Chelsea and learned about the history and more fun facts about the company.



As you walk into the Jiffy Mix headquarters in Chelsea, you can't help but to feel like you're walking into one of Michigan's most iconic institutions. I'm greeted by Howdy Holmes. He's president of the Chelsea Milling Company that produces the famous mixes. But I'm not the only one touring the facility today.



"Do you have a group in there?" asks Holmes.

"Yeah, we do."

Holmes is informed by an employee that about 50 second graders from North Creek Elementary School in Chelsea have just finished watching a video on Jiffy Mix at the facility's theatre.

"Does anybody recognize him from the video? Yes. That's Mr. Holmes, that's right," says a teacher.

The video included the company's mascot.

"I will be your video tour guide. My name is Cornelius J. Box. Around these parts, folks call me Corny," said the mascot.

At the end of the video, Corny, who is a Jiffy Mix box, does what is known as the Corny Dance. He spreads his arms from side to side and shakes his hips, or rather his box, as if he were inside a hula hoop. Holmes selects a few students and does the dance with them.



"The tour hosts don't like it when I come in. I kind of work everybody up and then I hand them over to them," said Holmes.

Holmes says he enjoys when the public visits the facility, because it provides a sense of family and inclusion and that's part of what the company is about. Holmes is a sixth-generation owner. His family has operated the facility since the late 1880's when it used to be called the Chelsea Roller Mill. Back then, they only produced flour. In the early 1900's, the company got its current name after Howdy's great-grandfather Harmon Samuel Holmes bought out the other partners and renamed it the Chelsea Milling Company.

"The history is, that my grandmother Mabel actually invented our first product. It was all-purpose baking mix, and it was introduced in April of 1930, and it was the first prepared mix ever," said Holmes.

Sitting in one of the chairs of the now-empty theatre, Holmes says the famous Jiffy Mix idea came to his grandmother after her twin boys invited a friend over to their house one day for lunch. The friend accepted the invitation but brought with him a bag lunch his single father had already prepared for him.

"When she opened the brown bag, right on top was a biscuit. She kind of referred to it later as, it looked like a white hockey puck. But she was so overwhelmed knowing, remember this is like 1925, 1926, knowing how much effort it took those days to make biscuits. It softened her heart, and she got the idea. Wouldn't it be nice to make a product that could save people time in the kitchen and be so easy, even a man could do it?" said Holmes.

Since then, the company has introduced other mixes such as pie crust, corn muffin and cakes. But Holmes says it took time for consumers to get used to the product.

"There were certain times where people didn't want to save them time because it might appear that they were cutting corners, so to speak. Well, they were cutting corners but in a positive way not in a negative way. It was not until the mid-sixties that we were everywhere in the country," said Holmes.

Today, Jiffy Mix can also be found in about 32 countries around the world. Not because they sell internationally, but because wholesalers resell their product.



To show me where the mixes are made, I put on a hair net and joined Holmes on the factory floor. Since the main baking season is between September and January, right now, most of the production lines consist of putting product boxes together and filling them with the mixes. One by one, empty boxes pass through a conveyer belt until they reach a machine that fills them. They are then weighed and packaged for shipment. Annually, the company produces 150 million pounds of their 15 different mixes for retail.

"This particular manufacturing area or packaging area is devoted exclusively to Corn Muffin product. As I said, that's our most popular. On an average day, during the baking season, we will make about 1.6 million boxes of Corn Muffins a day," said Holmes.



As we continue walking through the 400,000 square foot facility we bump into many of the 300 employees who work there. Holmes seems to know many of them by name.



"Hey Jeffrey," said Holmes.

Among them is Jeffrey Cammet. He's a maintenance worker who's been working there for 17 years.

"If you wear your Jiffy shirt outside of here people are like, 'Oh you work for Jiffy, I love the stuff, I love your corn bread.' It makes you feel good," said Cammet.

As we get closer to the end of our tour, we pass through a narrow room that connects part of the factory to an office area. It has light wooden floors and is decorated with lockers and a refrigerator. Holmes stops as we're about to leave what is now an employee break room and points up to the buildings framework. He says it's part of the original building that was constructed over 130 years ago.



"I personally enjoy walking through this part of our building because it reminds me of biological family and generations ago. I don't necessarily channel my family members, or maybe I do. But you asked a question earlier about how do I personally feel about that, and this demonstrates; it is a place I can visit where, a long time ago, people that I didn't know were doing the same thing, pretty much," said Holmes.

So what's next for Jiffy? Holmes says they will expand their sales operations for food services. That includes restaurants, schools, and hospitals.

"We just built a new facility that will be operational in June that's going to do all of that. We've increased our capacity by five times," said Holmes.

Throughout the tour, Holmes emphasized that Jiffy Mix is more than a product, it's an experience that creates memories at home. Maybe that's why the company's Corn Muffin Mix is the number one selling dried grocery item in the country with a 93% market share.

Tours of the facility are available Monday through Friday. Click [here](#) for more information.

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