

'Jiffy Mix' book hot off the presses

By Janet Ogle-Mater
Special Writer

Howard S. "Howdy" Holmes Jr. will be the guest speaker at the upcoming Chelsea Area Historical Society's Dinner and Lecture fund-raiser. Holmes will talk about his successful 20-year racing career and about the Chelsea Milling Company, the more than century-old family business of which he is president and CEO. Holmes will also be sharing aspects, and signing copies, of the new book, "JIFFY: A Family Tradition, Mixing Business and Old-Fashioned Values," by Cynthia Furlong Reynolds.

The book explores the early years of the mill, the beginnings of Jiffy baking mixes, and the changes that have taken the company into the 21st century.

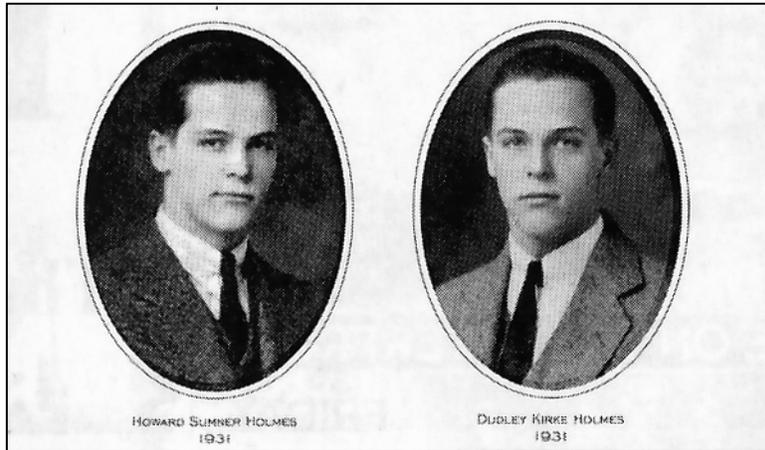
Through it all, four generations of Holmes family history is revealed.

"I wanted to honor my family before me and I felt a need to record our history," said Howdy. "It has been a heartwarming experience for me."

The idea for the book began in 1990, but was put on hold for several years after the unexpected death of the original author, Joseph Clayton.

"In 2001, I was moved to start the project again after the death of my father and the release of Reynolds' book, 'Our Hometown,'" Holmes recalled.

The inside jacket of the book reads like a recipe with ingredients including such attributes as courage, consideration, consistency, values, respect, and honor. It is easy to see how this mix of ingredients has combined to make a successful family-owned business for four generations. Chelsea Milling was founded in 1887 by E.K. White and incorporated in 1901. Harmon S. Holmes, a Chelsea businessman with a number of flourishing ventures, including H.S. Holmes Mercantile, bought the mill in 1908.



Howard Sumner Holmes and Dudley Kirke Holmes in 1931.

Early on he turned the management of the mill over to his son, Howard, who would marry E.K. White's daughter Mabel in 1912.

Mabel White Holmes went on to create Jiffy Baking Mix in 1930.

Then, tragedy struck the family when Howard Samuel Holmes fell to his death from a grain elevator inside a silo in 1936. Mabel and her 23-year-old twin sons, Howard and Dudley Holmes, took over running the company. In 1940, Howard Sumner Holmes became president, a position he held for 55 years.

"He never planned on being in the family business, but he did what he had to do, and without complaints," Howdy said of his father.

Unlike his father, Howdy knew he wanted to be in the family business.

"I grew up in the mill; I've done every job in the place at least once," he said.

But before joining the team at Jiffy, he was given the freedom and encouragement to pursue his childhood dream of auto racing. Holmes had a successful career, competing in six Indy 500 events and claiming "Rookie of the Year" in 1979. He also gained a wealth of experience in business management, marketing, and public relations.

He brought this business experience back to Chelsea Milling in 1987, and has been President and CEO since his father retired in 1995.

"When I returned, I saw a great brand, and principles, but knew there had to be some changes."

Howdy began to the move the company away from a proprietorship and toward a professionally managed company.

He also invested more into the employees and invited their collaboration.

"When you ask someone their opinion, you get different feedback from your own and you learn new things,"

Howdy said.

"My management system is not too complicated treat people the way you would like to be treated."

Howdy left unchanged the basic principles on which the company was founded, including a commitment to quality and value for a fair price.

"Our choice is to give consumers the best value," Holmes said. "We define 'value' as being the highest-quality ingredients at the best price."

One way they keep their prices low is not to spend money on advertising. In the nearly 80 years since the brand was founded, the company has never advertised.

It prefers to rely on consumer loyalty to the little blue-and-white box for quality and value.

It seems to be working: Chelsea Milling produces 1.6 million boxes of Jiffy mixes each day during the peak winter season, Holmes said, and claims 57 percent of the nation's total muffin mix market share. Its corn muffin mix, introduced in 1950, continues to be its top seller.

To hear more about the Chelsea Milling Company and the new book, join the Chelsea Area Historical Society at 7 p.m. July 18 at Silver Maples of Chelsea.

Tickets are \$30 per person or \$50 for a ticket and copy of the book, and on sale at the Gourmet Chocolate Café, 312 N. Main St.