

# BottomLine

THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 25, NO. 7 // JULY 2014



REMEMBERING MIKE GEORGE //

## Over 50 Years of Service to the Independent Retail Community

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EVENTS

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AFPD's Seven Pillars of  
Service // PAGE 3



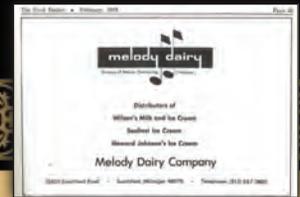
# In Loving Memory ...



*Michael J. George*

DECEMBER 20, 1948 - JUNE 24, 2014

U.S. ARMY  
RANK: TECHNICAL SERGEANT  
TOUR: KOREA AND JAPAN  
SERVED: 1953-1955



ADVERTISEMENT 1973



ADVERTISEMENT 1976



1982 ADVERTISEMENT



1975 ADVERTISEMENT



1982 ADVERTISEMENT

## Saying Good-Bye to a Business Icon

He was dubbed the “Godfather” by the media decades ago but it was a title that never really sat well with Michael George. He not only defined a generation, his death marked the end of an era. He gained the reputation as a fair-minded and savvy businessman during the 53 years he owned Melody Farms and over the last several decades as a mediator in business. Mike George died at the age of 81 surrounded by family.

Despite the fact he sold his dairy business in 2003, George never retired and he never had plans to do so.

“I get asked the question all the time, ‘when will you retire Mike?’ I say, when I retire you are all invited. It will be my funeral,” he has been quoted saying over the years.

George was a longtime member and supporter of the AFPD.

George was the Chaldean community’s leader and spokesman for the better part of a generation. He championed several essential causes for the Chaldean community as the former chairman of the Chaldean Federation of America and as co-founder and past president of the Chaldean Iraqi American Association of Michigan. He was instrumental in establishing both the Southfield Manor and later the Shenandoah Country Club. He was one of the driving forces behind the formation of Bank of Michigan, a community bank focused largely on small business lending, which George believed was the essence of the American dream. Most recently he championed several new programs to aid tens of thousands of Christian refugees of the Iraq War.

For these contributions and others George earned awards too numerous to mention, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor (2001) for his outstanding service and achievements as an American of Chaldean heritage, the Arab American and Chaldean Council Entrepreneur of the Year (1998), and **Associated Food Dealer’s Man of The Year (2001)**.

“Mike George was great businessman. He was sharp and to the point and left a mark with everyone he met. He served our country in Korea and was a great American and a business icon that loved and cherished his Chaldean heritage and loved his family. He will be sorely missed.” said Auday Arabo.

When Mike George first graduated from High School, he had no intentions of heading into the grocery business. His father had been in the milk business in the 40s during the depression. Mike George ran the company until he joined the army in 1953 where he served for two years. His brother Sharkey took over until Mike return from the service.

The brothers created a successful dairy business distributing milk through Wilson Dairy at the time. They added vitamin D to the milk and as a result they had the highest butterfat milk of all the competitors. The more fat the smoother the product.

In 1962 the name changed to Mello-D to compliment the smooth texture and the vitamin D but they eventually changed the spelling to Melody Farms.

They were able to market the name using George’s youngest son and name sake Michael as a feature Melody Farms ads.

The commercial increased the business dramatically. Melody Farms went from \$10 million in sales to \$30 million and George family began to acquire several companies and distributors eventually buying nearly 20 dairy companies including purchasing Stroh’s in the 90s.

Selling the business was not something George anticipated. His sons and some nephews were active investors in the company. Mike and his wife Najat have six sons, Anthony, Bobby, Rodney, Lenne, Scott and Michael and 10 grandchildren.

When the family finally sold Melody Farms, the timing to sell was optimal. The sons were groomed to move onto the next level and the industry was on the cusp of change. Dean Food, based in Texas, eventually purchased Melody Farms from the George Family. He sold the business much like had done business over the previous five decades, with a handshake.

George not only made the decision to sell based on the economic climate but he was concerned about the community. “Most of our people didn’t choose their profession at the time we were building our business,” he said. “They did not have a choice to go into the grocery business. Our people are true entrepreneurs. They know how to re-invent themselves. They take risks.”

True to his words, George never retired. He continued working alongside his sons until he became ill. They have many entities including, food, manufacturing, technology, health & fitness, real estate, warehousing, entertainment and philanthropy.

The most active companies are Champion Wholesale – warehouse fresh meat, deli and flower, ServFresh Foods – processor of deli trays, Pioneer Meats – ready to eat meat and deli products, UrthTech – natural disinfectant and Port Atwater Parking – commercial parking deck.

The man with an entrepreneurial spirit was also very charitable. He dedicated countless hours to helping other entrepreneurs, charitable organizations and community projects. Never asking for recognition or even a thank you, others have realized the impacts he has had on the community. He has not only been a business leader, he is an advocate for the community

A man who had a true sense of pride and humility he once said, “Business is simple, we make it complicated.”

He credits his success of being able to build a multimillion dollar company from a truck and a route to three simple rules: always tell the truth, treat people with respect and be responsive. “In the end, it is not about price. It is about the relationships you build over the years.”

He built many relationships as the quintessential connector.

Mike George made an impression on everyone he met and an impact on generations.

“Mike George was one of the first people that welcomed me to Michigan and was always there when I needed to talk about an issue. Selfishly, I will miss the lunches we would have every few months or so. Words cannot say what this great man meant to so many people in the food and beverage industry and the Chaldean community. May you rest in peace.” ■

# Mike George and AFD

Mike George was a longtime member and supporter of AFD, formerly known as Associated Food Dealers (AFD).



THE FOOD DEALER  
SEPT-OCT, 1969



**PATRICK FOX**  
Manufacturer  
Stroh Brewery Co.



**MITCH WARMINSKI**  
Broker  
Continental Food Bkge.



**ROBERT ZAKOOR**  
Broker  
Mort Weisman Assoc.



**MICHAEL GEORGE**  
Wholesaler  
Melody Dairy Co.



**WILLIAM RITTER**  
Driver - Salesman  
Frito-Lay, Inc.

## Six Receive AFD Distinguished Service Awards

Six food firm representatives have been cited by the Associated Food Dealers (AFD) for "distinguished and extraordinary service" to the food industry.

In conjunction with its fifth Annual Awards Banquet held at the Warren Chateau Hall in Warren, the state's largest food distribution association, with over 1,900 members, presented the six individuals with citations for outstanding service.

Recipients of the "Salesmen of the Year" honors were Patrick J. Fox, merchandising manager for Stroh Brewery Company; Mitchell J. Warminski, sales coordinator for Continental Food Brokerage Company; Robert Zakoor, sales representative, Mort Weisman Associates, food brokerage; Michael George, sales manager for Melody Dairy Company; and William Ritter, route salesman for Frito-Lay, Inc.

It was the first time two awards were given in the food broker category, resulting from a tie of the awards committee.

Moe R. Miller, an attorney who heads his own accounting and law firm located in Oak Park, was the recipient of the AFD's distinguished service citation for serving as consultant to the association and food industry companies for many years.

Presenting the 1969 awards in behalf of the association were Harvey L. Weisberg, president, and Edward Deeb, executive director. Over 600 persons attended the annual event.

Wayne County Probate Judge George N. Bashara Jr., recently appointed to the position by Gov. Milliken, was the guest speaker at the association's awards ceremonies. His talk centered around community commitment and involvement at all levels, including politics, urging businessmen to speak out on the issues.

▲ MIKE WINS AFD'S DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD IN 1969

AFD SCHOLARSHIP DINNER RAFFLE 1974 ▶



Michael George of Melody Dairy Company was awarded the second place prize of \$100; Ed Budde of The Pfeister Company, was the recipient of the third place \$50 cash prize; and Ivan Ludington, Jr. of Ludington News Company was the recipient of the fourth place \$50 prize. Messrs. George, Budde and Ludington all donated their cash prizes to the Scholarship Fund, as did hundreds of other cash prize winners. In fact, some \$875 in cash prizes were donated back by the winners to the fund.

For those of you who did not attend, it was quite an exciting evening, especially when it got down to the 10 finalists.

As a result of the dinner-raffle, some \$3,300 was netted for the fund, bringing the total to around \$5,000 to be given out in scholarships.

▶  
AFD GOLF  
OUTING  
1974



POSING for The Food Dealer photographer are, from left, Sharkey George and Mike George of Melody Dairy Company; and Leo Gage and Peter Ardwin of Ardwin Hayes Ice Cream Co.

▶  
AFD GOLF  
OUTING  
1975



EMIL DePULIS of Detroit Coca-Cola Bottling Company, right, accepts the grand prize golf set he won. Congratulating him is Mike George Melody Dairy Company.



THE TWO FINALISTS, Jack Grifo, left, and Mike George, extend good luck to each other before the final drawing.

# The Passing of Michael J. George – A Remembrance

**M**ichael J. George, an icon in metro Detroit and a pillar in the Chaldean community, passed away at age 81. George was the quintessential American success story, having built the Melody Farms Dairy Company with his brother Sharkey from a single milk route in 1950 to a business with over \$150 million in revenues. He was one of the most recognizable and revered businessmen in Michigan, best known for his humility, responsiveness and making deals with a handshake instead of a contract.

George was the Chaldean community's most respected leader and spokesman for the better part of a generation. He championed several essential causes for the Chaldean community as the former Chairman of the Chaldean Federation of America and as co-founder and past president of the Chaldean Iraqi American Association of Michigan. He was instrumental in establishing both the Southfield Manor and later the Shenandoah Banquet, Golf, Community and Conference Center. He was one of the driving forces behind the formation of Bank of Michigan, a community bank focused largely on small business lending, which George believed was the essence of the American dream. Most recently he championed several new programs to aid tens of thousands of minority Christians flee unrelenting violence and persecution in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

George had a considerable impact on the success of Chaldeans in the metro-Detroit area and also to the city of Detroit itself. After the Detroit riots in 1967, George, who by then had been in the dairy business for 15 years, encouraged Chaldean storeowners to stay in the city. He assisted many in their efforts to rebuild, open and buy more stores. Eventually, over the course of 30 years, George helped finance over 700 new stores (many in Detroit).

"Michael J. George was a metro Detroit leader, known for his community and business leadership, but also for his warmth and kindness...Detroit, and Michigan as a whole, is a better place because of him, and the people he inspired. Their success will be his legacy," said Michigan Governor Rick Synder.

Gerald Rosen, the Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court in Detroit, described him as "a treasure of our community" who "has long been an important mentor to many men and women in our great community, and his leadership, wisdom and generous heart have endeared him to people of all faiths and backgrounds."

Among the people who sought his counsel and advice are state and local political leaders, including former United States Senator and United States

Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, who described George as "a great friend and mentor to me and countless others who were fortunate enough to know him." Longtime United States Senator Carl Levin describes him as "a great friend of Detroit and a great friend of mine," who has "given himself and his resources to provide a helping hand to countless individuals throughout the Detroit area."

George was born in Detroit, Michigan on December 20, 1932. Upon graduating Catholic Central High School in 1950, George, his father Tom and his brother Sharkey started Tom George & Sons Dairy with \$412, a coffee table and an 11-year-old truck to distribute Wilson's dairy products.

After two years he left the family business to serve in the Army during the Korean War, from 1953-1955, obtaining the rank of sergeant. Upon his return, he rejoined the family business, which eventually became known as Melody Farms.

George became a legend in the dairy industry. He grew the company rapidly, both organically and through acquisitions, including Richardson Dairy, All Star Dairy, Sealtest Dairy, Twin Pines Dairy Company, Stroh's Ice Cream and, ironically, the very first company with which he worked, Wilson's Dairy. Prior to their sale to industry leader Dean's Foods in 2003, Melody Farms had several lines of dairy products, over 80 flavors of ice cream, over 10,000 customers and was one of the largest privately held dairy and beverage distribution companies in the United States. George went on to pursue several other business interests, including real estate such as hotels, office buildings, and parking garages, and companies in several different industries, including food products, technology, banking, warehousing and others. George always stayed active in business and philanthropy, at one point serving on 19 boards simultaneously.

George was a dedicated family man. He enjoyed boating and an occasional cigar, but looked most forward to dinner at his home with his entire family every Sunday.

Michael George is survived by his wife of 54 years, Najat, their six sons and three daughter-in-laws, Anthony and Sheila, Robert and Mimi, Rodney and Paulette, Lenny, Scott and Michael II, 10 grandchildren Amber, Dominic, Lorenzo, Robert Jr. (and his wife Lindsey), Samantha, Blake, Brittany, Michaela, Nicholas and Caitlin, and his older brother, Sharkey and his wife Rita.

In light of his longstanding commitment to charity, in lieu of flowers the family requests that donations be made to the Michael J. George Charity at 30777 Northwestern Highway, Suite 300, Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334 or online at [www.mjgcharity.org](http://www.mjgcharity.org). ■

THE GEORGE FAMILY

