McKee Foods Corporation was founded in 1934 when young couple, O.D. and Ruth McKee, bought Jack’s Cookie Company, a small bakery in Chattanooga, Tenn., and started baking small cakes. O.D. spent the previous year selling 5-cent Virginia Dare cakes from the back seat of his 1928 Whippet car. Selling sweets was how he supported his wife and three small children during the Depression, and he was confident that he could be successful selling sweets again.

Ruth joined her husband as a full, equal and involved partner. She hired a housekeeper to care for the children so she could manage the office, employees and buy ingredients while O.D. went on the road to build sales.

O.D. was a visionary, always looking for new and better ways of doing things. New products and new equipment were his areas of expertise. His creative drive and passion for the future made him a risk taker. Fortunately, Ruth’s cautious nature and sound judgment helped keep him grounded. The combination of their personalities created a perfect balance of vision and structure that led to tremendous success.

In 1937, the McKees sought expansion by moving the plant to Charlotte, N.C. They returned to Chattanooga in 1952, and in 1957 they moved their business to the small town of Collegedale, Tenn. After their manufacturing plant had been expanded 13 times, a second plant was built close by. Today, Little Debbie® snacks, America’s number-one snack cakes, are manufactured in Collegedale, Tenn., Gentry, Ark., and Stuarts Draft, Va. McKee Foods also has a distribution center in Kingman, Ariz. O.D. and Ruth’s sons led the company for many years. One of them, Ellsworth McKee, continues to serve as chairman of the board and senior vice president. Additionally, four of the founders’ grandchildren, representing the third generation of the family, manage the corporation.

Since 1934, the company has seen a lot of expansion and change, but the way McKee Foods operates is still based on the principles left by O.D. and Ruth which emphasize family values and integrate those values into daily operations.

How to Succeed in Business ... And In Life

- **Be adaptable.** You can’t grow if you’re not willing to change. McKee Foods used to make layer cakes until they discovered they were no longer profitable. In 1991, the company name changed from McKee Baking Company to McKee Foods Corporation because some products were not baked. Change is necessary and inevitable in order to grow, and you must be willing to adapt.

- **Fill a niche.** McKee Foods produces a quality product at a reasonable price. That’s a niche the company fills better than anyone in the business. In 1960, the company pioneered the family pack, a package of individual snack cakes that sold for 49 cents. They named them after their granddaughter Debbie, and the rest is history.

- **Treat people well.** At McKee Foods, employees feel valued and respected. When Ruth McKee hired long-haul drivers she was always approachable, considerate and concerned for the drivers’ safety. “Every time I see one of our trucks on the road I pray for your safety,” she often told drivers. McKee Foods carries on the tradition of concern for employees and proves it by providing good conditions to provide outstanding quality and service.

- **Value your consumers.** The company wouldn’t exist if someone didn’t buy the products. McKee Foods produces a wide range of products to please a variety of people. The company also maintains a toll-free number to answer consumer questions.

- **Be demanding of yourself and others.** “I’d never ask someone to do something I wouldn’t do myself,” said O.D. McKee once. The McKees work hard and expect their employees to be productive too. They also expect their suppliers to provide outstanding quality and service.

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*O.D. McKee driving his 1928 Whippet.*

*Current packaging.*
wages and benefits packages to attract and keep good employees. Many employees end up working at McKee Foods for decades because they are treated so well.

- **Don’t be discouraged by setbacks.** Successful business people refuse to give up when problems occur. In the early 1950s, problems at their plant in Charlotte, N.C., caused the McKees to sell it and consider early retirement. Instead, they took a large pay cut and started all over again.

- **Be ethical.** In all business dealings, McKee Foods subscribes to the highest ethics. It’s not just the best way to do business; it’s the only way. Being ethical involves being honest, fair and respectful, and that is the way McKee Foods operates.

- **Take risks.** If the McKees hadn’t taken risks, the company probably wouldn’t exist today. When O.D. and Ruth moved the plant to Charlotte, they took a risk; when they decided to move back to Chattanooga, and then to move the plant to Collegedale, they took a risk.

- **Find a better way.** Throughout the company’s history, McKee Foods has invented or modified machinery and equipment, improved processes and developed new products. Finding that better way is just one more reason why Little Debbie® snacks are America’s number-one snack cakes.

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**Family Statement**

The McKee family acknowledges the providence of God in our continued success. We plan to remain privately owned, to continue our growth and to give job security to those who work with us.

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