



Contact: Mike Gloekler,
corporate communications & PR manager
Office: 423-238-7111, Ext. 22440
Cell: 423-364-4431
Email: mike.gloekler@mckee.com

Large turnout to help celebrate 50 years of Little Debbie® Swiss Rolls *Inspired in Switzerland. Baked in America.*

COLLEGEDALE, Tenn., Nov. 7, 2013 — About 100 people gathered today at Waterhouse Pavilion to help McKee Foods Corporation celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of its most iconic snacks — Little Debbie® Swiss Rolls.

Greeted at the door by a pair of alpenhorn players, the mood of the celebration was upbeat and fun as guests shared Little Debbie Swiss Roll stories. Some relayed their first memories of the delicious chocolate-coated rolled chocolate cake and creme concoction. Others discussed their preferred method of eating them.

Bob Doak, president and CEO of the Chattanooga Convention and Visitors Bureau, emceed the event and declared it a “Golden Anniversary.”

Other speakers included Jim Coppinger, Hamilton County mayor; Heinz Roth, honorary Swiss consul, from Charlotte, NC; and Mike McKee, president and CEO, McKee Foods.

Special greetings were also delivered to the group in person by Andy Berke, mayor, and Rep. Chuck Fleischmann (3rd Tenn.). Video greetings were also enjoyed from Gov. Bill Haslam and Sen. Bob Corker.

The catered lunch of Swiss-inspired foods was created by local caterer SwissAm Catering.

And, while nearly everyone is familiar with the iconic, cream-filled chocolate treat, not many know the story of how it made its way from Central Europe to a small Tennessee town — and then all over the country.

The story begins in 1962, when O.D. McKee, owner and founder of McKee Foods and the Little Debbie brand, attended a European trade show. “Dad went overseas that year for the big meeting,” son, Jack McKee, recalls of the fateful trip. “And while he was there he visited lots of other bakeries.”

Known for his relentless pursuit of innovation, both in the products he offered, as well as in the way they were made, O.D. McKee was always looking for the next big thing.

What he found on this journey was the mini Swiss roll, a small, rolled cake modeled after a popular Swiss dessert called a roulade.

“There were multiple high-volume manufacturers making them in Europe,” said Jack McKee.
“They were very popular over there.”

One of those manufacturers was J. Lyons & Co., a London-based bakery which allowed O.D. to tour their facility to see how they made their Swiss rolls. There he learned how to bake, fill and roll Swiss rolls on a large scale. It is said that night he sketched out the full plans for building a Swiss roll line at his own facility.

When O.D. returned home to Collegedale, Tenn., he quickly purchased an electric oven and converted it into two production lines. When production began in 1963, the line turned out 300 cases of Little Debbie® Swiss Rolls per shift. The new treats were an instant hit here in the U.S., where their popularity spread far and wide.

Today, millions of cases are sold every year throughout the country, making Swiss Rolls one of the top sellers among all Little Debbie® products.

All thanks to a little Swiss inspiration and a lot of American ingenuity, courtesy of O.D. McKee.

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