

1865

1880

1895

1910

1925

# INTRODUCTION

**By Earl H. Potter III**

**President of St. Cloud State University**

*This introduction was written in the original book, "Behind the Store Shelves", in 2014, by then-president of St. Cloud State University, Earl H. Potter III. Sadly, he passed away unexpectedly in 2016. We are grateful for the very kind words that President Potter wrote at that time and continue to appreciate today, the friendship and relationship we enjoyed with him.*

For five generations, members of the Coborn family have been meeting the needs of our community for groceries and so much more.

*Coborn's*

Since the family planted roots in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, Coborn men and women have propagated and nurtured a vision driven by values, grounded in a concern for the broader community. Underlying all that they do is a bold spirit and strong faith in a tradition that includes "Coborn's Golden Rule – treat all with dignity and respect."

*Golden Rule –*

Nearly a century ago, Chester A. Coborn began operating small grocery stores, opening his first Coborn's store in 1921. Since beginning as a small produce market, the company has mushroomed into a multi-site supermarket, liquor and convenience retailer, and an industry leader. A Coborn's paycheck supports nearly 8,000 employees in communities throughout six states.

*treat all with*

But that's just part of the Coborns' reach into the communities served by the family business. When Grocery Headquarters magazine honored the St. Cloud-based Coborn's, Inc. with its prestigious "Independent Retailer of the Year" award for 2011, the publication stated that "Coborn's Incorporated's commitment to its community, as well as its progressive approaches to merchandising and marketing, make it an easy choice." That award followed Minnesota Business magazine's Family Business of the Year Award for Community Service and Philanthropy in 2010.

*dignity and*

*respect*

St. Cloud State University is one of many institutions to benefit from the Coborn family's generosity. Starting with Dan and Chris Coborn's roles in bringing Division I hockey, Coach Herb Brooks and the National Hockey Center to St. Cloud State, the family has supported scholarship programs and facilities improvements for Husky athletics. Four years ago, we forged a new connection with the company with the opening of Coborn Plaza, a \$30-million retail, office and residential complex that is at the center of the renaissance of St. Cloud's historic Fifth Avenue from the River's Edge Convention Center through downtown to the National Hockey and Event Center on the south end of campus.



1955

1985

2015

1940

1970

2000

Coborn Plaza houses the university's leased Coborn Plaza Apartments, offering housing to more than 450 students, as well as St. Cloud State's Welcome Center, our visible "front door" for the community. Several university-based offices such as the Small Business Development Center and microloan program at the Center assist area entrepreneurs in achieving their own business dreams.

Students at Saint John's University, and the College of Saint Benedict, the alma mater of several members of the Coborn family, have been the beneficiaries of a generous endowment for one of the largest scholarship funds available for their Central Minnesota students.

Coborn's Inc. is a major funder for the Coborn Cancer Center, Central Minnesota's premier center for cancer treatment and research. If you know the family, you know they are not giving to impress. They are giving to fulfill a personal commitment to giving back that has continued through the generations of Coborn leadership.

The Coborns are known for treating employees like family. Their business and community values have rubbed off on generations of young employees. Many a high school or college student has been well launched with a first work experience at a Coborn-owned business.

Dan and Mabel Coborn made a particularly deep and lasting impression on one St. Cloud State college student who came to campus in 1971 from another world – the south side of Chicago. Tony Latta got a job with Coborn's loading the bread delivery truck that Mabel drove back in the seventies.

In 1977, Latta graduated with a degree in economics and the distinction of being the first commissioned African-American from a St. Cloud Reserve Officers Training Corps unit. Dan and Mabel Coborn attended his commissioning ceremony, proudly sending him off to a distinguished 12-year career in the military.

Latta later earned a master's degree from Webster University and founded Invictus Systems, a Washington, D.C. software company that produces nutrition labels for companies including Campbell's, Nestle and Stouffer's.

In 2004, he was presented the St. Cloud State University Alumni Award from the College of Social Sciences. Dan and Mabel Coborn wrote the letter of nomination for the successful businessman they mentored at a pivotal time in his educational journey.

This book outlines the company's history for nearly a century. The values that Coborn's represents today were evident back when Chester was laying the groundwork for successful growth and remain evident in the leadership of Chester's great-grandson, Chris, the company's President and CEO. The creativity, innovation and leadership of the Coborn family stand out in a changing industry. Grounded in partnerships with the communities that they serve, the family business has thrived.

It is not an easy thing to stay true to values embedded in a family business by its founder. Many businesses have lost their way across generations. Coborn's has not and I think that I know why. The heads of the Coborn family business have drawn strength from their families and have given as much attention to growing their children as they have to growing their business. They have seen the deep satisfaction that comes from balance between work and family, both important and each sustaining the other. The Coborns pay attention to the impact of their business on the lives of their employees and they understand that the success of their business depends on the health of the communities that they serve. They are both practical and idealistic. They believe that it is possible to build a better world but only if the world is better for everyone, not just themselves.

My life is better because I know the Coborns and they have shared their vision with me. It is an honor to introduce the story of this remarkable family to you. We all have much to learn from their example.