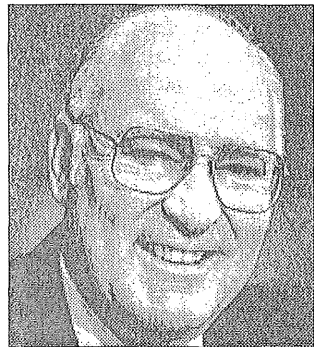


Marcel 'Sal' Frederick RESTAURATEUR, LEGISLATOR

'Happy Chef' started as Army cook



**« HE LIVED IT,
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By JENNA ROSS
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Marcel Frederick stood just 5-foot-5, but his legacy might be closer in size to the iconic, 36-foot statue along Hwy. 169 of a smiling chef brandishing a wooden spoon. Frederick, who went by "Sal," was the original Happy Chef, a long-time restaurateur, four-term legislator and fixture in the Mankato community.

He died Sept. 24 at age 86.

"He lived it, breathed it, ate it. It was his life," Tom Frederick Jr., Frederick's nephew, said of the restaurant business. "He'd be out to eat at a place, and if he didn't believe they were making the pancakes right, he'd offer a suggestion."

Born on a farm in Medicine Lake, Minn., Frederick started cooking during World War II. He had been on the front lines but volunteered to be an Army cook — a safer post. "They sent me to the kitchen to be a cook, and I've been one ever since," Frederick told the Free Press newspaper in 2005.

After the war, working as a chef at the Saulpaugh Hotel in Mankato, he met Rose, who would become his wife. She babysat the owners' children and, on her break, would stop by the restaurant.

"The help just had to eat whatever was left over," said Vicky McLaughlin, one of Frederick's six daughters. "But Dad would ask Mom, 'What would you like me to make you?' So Mom knew he

was special on her."

The pair ran the 22-stool Hidden Inn, then a few other cafes. In 1963, Frederick and two of his brothers founded the first Happy Chef, which eventually grew to 56 restaurants in seven states. Today, three remain. His daughters knew the menu by heart.

"What he would call our family vacation would be a tour of all the Happy Chef restaurants," McLaughlin said, laughing. Each manager, surprised by his visit, would call the next, she said. "Sal's coming," they'd said. "He might be headed your way."

Frederick and his brothers balanced one another, Tom Frederick Jr. said. Sal, friendly and frugal, focused on public relations and inspecting operations. He cleaned windows with newspaper, brought home food that wasn't served and ate leftover bologna on his cereal.

He taught his daughters that "there was usually a better way, a more frugal way, to do things," McLaughlin said.

For two decades, he was a board member of the Minnesota Restaurant Association, and its president in the 1960s, playing "a key role in the revitalization and expansion" of the association, according to its website.

"This guy worked with everybody," said W.J. "Chum" Bohr, Hospitality Minnesota's former executive vice president. "They bought his ideas. They bought his personality."

In 2005, Frederick was one

of eight inaugural inductees of the Minnesota Hospitality Hall of Fame. "The legions of children who recall ... having their picture taken with their favorite talking statue will always remember their time with their Happy Chef," his Hall of Fame biography says.

After selling his share of the Happy Chef company, Frederick was elected to the state House of Representatives and served from 1985 to 1992 on agriculture, education and veterans affairs committees.

He also volunteered with the North Mankato American Legion, where he served on the color guard and as a chaplain.

"Even after he left the Legislature, the people of Mankato always came to him," Bohr said. "He would go out of his way to help them, right up to the end. He was a man who cared."

Frederick's survivors include four siblings and five daughters: Kathryn Swartout of Minnetonka, McLaughlin of Eagle Lake, Rebecca Aspelund of Minnetonka, Mary Potz of White Bear Lake, and Molly Wolff of Englewood, Colo. He also has 15 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

A mass will be held at 11 a.m. Friday in St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Mankato, with burial in Calvary Cemetery, where his headstone reads, "Happy Chef."

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