

Dr. Don Newbury...50-year Popcorn Tradition--

Shown with 4th machine and rescue dog Archie...



THE IDLE AMERICAN

Popcorn Tradition Crosses State Lines....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

Column #1,100 For Release Week of July 15, 2024, or Later

A popcorn tradition was born 50 years ago this summer in the garage of our home in southwest Fort Worth.

That was some 26 tons of popcorn and four machines ago. It was sparked by the late Dr. Veda Hodge, who owned a string of movie theaters and multiple West Texas oil wells.

She heard that I was making snow cones for our pre-school daughters and neighborhood friends--albeit settling for "snow" with texture akin to road gravel. We used a near-antique machine purchased in a second-hand store. Dr. Hodge insisted on providing a used popcorn machine so we'd have treats more popular during cooler months....

We provided snow cones for all takers. After all, unit costs were held to about two cents each. Happily, neighbors helped out, freezing ice in gallon jugs.

Popcorn soon was consumed not only by neighborhood children, but also from speaking lecterns, where I appeared more than 100 times annually for more than fifty years. For two decades, Halloween has been a big deal, with between 500-700 youngsters showing up for treats.

Somewhere, Dr. Veda is smiling....

Popcorn probably best defines my presidency/chancellorship at Howard Payne University. The tradition--along with taking students and others parasailing at Lake Brownwood--provides fond memories. So does an introduction once made by a dear departed friend, George Dolan, whose daily front-page column in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram delighted readers for three decades.

He called me "the nation's 'unstuffiest' college president."

It is a description I treasure....

All of my popcorn machines have been, uh, experienced, with some nearing antique status. When I bought a large coffin-shaped popcorn machine from an old theater 22 years ago, I thought it would serve the rest of the way.

A kink in the acquisition loomed, however. Our garage would not accommodate two cars AND an oversized popcorn machine. Simple solution: Our modest Burleson, TX, retirement home--under construction at the time--was widened by just two feet, thus accommodating the machine.

I don't remember--and don't care to remember--how much this added to the cost, but it has been worth it, even though Brenda, my wife of almost 58 years, still frets a bit, referencing "that odor in the garage." I contend that it's an "aroma."....

Fast forward to the here and now: David Williams (HPU, 2005) is a "do-everything" kind of guy. He reconstructed a popcorn machine that is virtually identical to the one Dr. Hodge gave me. He sent me a picture, and yep, the machine was for sale.

I purchased it sight unseen and soon he delivered it to our home. Uh oh. Now I had two machines--one bigger than now needed and the other a sentimental favorite--like the ones seen on sidewalks outside of small theaters for the convenience of popcorn-purchasing passers-by.

After 29 years of handing out presidential, then chancellor popcorn, it is time for me to shift gears. I'll settle for my smaller machine, and now hand out PEP-corn (aka, "president emeritus popcorn.")....

This spring my wife and I had lunch with Dr. and Mrs. Brad Johnson at College of the Ozarks near Branson, MO., where he has been president for about two years. In his earliest years of college administration, we served together at HPU, where his wife, Laura, received her baccalaureate degree.

During lunch, they both mentioned their hope to find a tradition like ours at HPU. “What about sharing the tradition into the next 50 years?” I asked. Did I ever have a deal for them!

Recently, they had a big “whoop-de-do” with a program to celebrate the passing of the scoop. Featured were printed programs, balloons, and a sumptuous luncheon. I stumbled a time or two when emotions got in the way, sometimes saying, “Um,” thus unknowingly creating a new acronym that’s a perfect fit for both HPU and CofO. “U MATTER” is conveyed with each bag. May the tradition live on!....

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