

# SAM'S CLUB® Inspirational Supplier Story

## *Barber Foods* of Portland, Maine

Quality, innovation and heart

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It started in 1955 with a seemingly simple idea that was to change an industry: Cut whole chickens into breasts and legs. With this step, the consumers could buy just the cuts they preferred. Until then, chicken only came one way – you had to buy the whole bird. Fifty years and a lot of entrepreneurial grit later, Barber Foods dominates markets invented by founder Gus Barber.

His next “aha” moment (and the Barbers, as a family, seem to have these inspirations on a regular basis) focused on how to utilize all of the leftover bits of chicken created by his portion cutting. In 1967, he breaded these little chunks and introduced chicken nuggets and chicken fingers to the foodservice world. Gus created a phenomenon that has become the comfort food for generations of American children.

The product he envisioned next would make Barber chicken dishes a staple on menus across America, and in the SAM'S CLUB freezer case. He worked with his wife Marjorie in their home kitchen. They put a chicken breast on top of stuffing and froze it in an individual tray. As with all of the Barber products, the ready-to-cook breast with stuffing was an immediate hit when he presented it to his customers. Eighty-four-year-old Gus still glows with the memory. “This product was delicious. Everyone who tasted it ordered it by the case,” he said.

Today, Barber Foods manufactures more than 300 varieties of prepared chicken products with a dazzling array of stuffed chicken breasts at the core of their business. Some of the first products to really make a splash – Chicken Cordon Bleu, Broccoli and Cheese Stuffed Chicken and Chicken Kiev – are still best-sellers today. Creative new products to come from the Barber kitchens include Wild Rice Stuffed Breast, Apple Crème Brie Stuffed Breasts, Honey Crunch Tenders with Sweet Chili Dipping Sauce and Four Cheese Stuffed Nuggets.



### BUSINESS MEMBER PROFILE

#### SUPPLIER AND BUSINESS MEMBERS

GUS, MARJORIE, STEPHEN,  
JULIE, DAVID AND  
KATHY BARBER  
BARBER FOODS  
P.O. Box 4821  
PORTLAND, ME  
1-800-577-2595  
[WWW.BARBERFOODS.COM](http://WWW.BARBERFOODS.COM)  
1987

#### SUPPLIER AND COMPANY NAME ADDRESS

PHONE  
WEB SITE  
MEMBER SINCE



## Treasure Hunt in the Freezer

Did you know? Every other month there is a new Barber Foods product in the freezer case. It's always something interesting and new – often created just for SAM'S CLUB Members, and not available anywhere else. These unique recipes are great as a seasonal special on your menu or just to keep your family interested at dinnertime.

This month look for Distinctions Wild Rice Stuffed Chicken Breast, four plump breasts filled with seasoned long grain and wild rice.



In any family run business, the values of the family will be key to the culture of the company. Founder Gus Barber is a simple man with an impressive ability to trust his instincts and take the risks that are necessary to grow a business. When asked to sum up his business success he said, "I am an ordinary man. I just did what no one else was doing. I saw something people needed that they weren't getting anywhere else." His wife Marjorie has been his partner and confidant every step of the way.

His instincts also led him to believe unswervingly in quality as key, and in the necessity of a respectful environment for his associates. With Marjorie's help, and Gus' joyful, optimistic personality, Gus enjoyed putting in the long hours required to build a business from a simple shop to a multi-million dollar showpiece for the state of Maine. Gus says with a smile, "We always had the confidence that nobody was going to make a product that tasted better than ours."

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The hands-on participation and passionate focus on quality of the entire Barber clan has created a business that is a model of how to balance all that's wonderful about modern technology with an old fashioned investment in their associates' well-being and development. Gus and his children, who run the business today, share an enormous pride in everything they make, which has clearly translated to their devoted associates. They believe that Barber products are the best with an enthusiasm that is rare to see in such an established business. VP of National Accounts Julie Barber laughingly

## 50 Years at Barber Foods

- 1955 Gus and Marjorie Barber buy an existing meat business
- 1965 Gus introduces boneless, portion-controlled chicken breasts; there are 20 associates
- 1967 Gus introduces breaded Chicken Nuggets
- 1971 Gus creates the Stuffed Chicken Breast
- 1979 Stuffed Chicken Breast goes onto a production line
- 1981 Barber Foods goes national; there are about 200 associates
- 1984 Gus promotes sons Steven and David to take the helm and becomes Chairman
- 1991 Daughter, Julie Barber, joins Barber Foods
- 1992 Barber Foods initiates Worksmart, providing associates with free educational opportunities
- 1998 There are more than 700 Barber associates
- 2005 Barber Foods moves into a new 250,000 square-foot facility; the company has 850 full-time associates from 48 nations
- The Governor of Maine declares September 10, 2005, "Barber Foods Day" in Maine.

quoted the company motto, "If they try it, they will buy it!"

Gus and Marjorie's caring attitude doesn't end at their company doors. Among the many community projects they have supported, there is one that is closest to their hearts. The coastline near their home is rugged and beautiful, offering breathtaking views of nearby islands, working boats and a series of romantic lighthouses. Along one particularly beautiful stretch, a rough walkway had been carved from the rolling cliff, offering the nimble-footed a spectacular vista across the bay to Portland. Unfortunately, the path was impassable for any but the physically fit. When it became clear that public funds weren't available to upgrade the trail, Gus and Marjorie decided to underwrite the creation of





## 50 **HAPPY 50TH ANNIVERSARY BARBER FOODS – LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT 50**

a real cliff walk with cleared paths and comfortable benches. This family gift to the people of Portland will allow generations to freely enjoy a place whose beauty has meant so much to the Barbers.

Today, the Research and Development department at Barber Foods, the second-generation Barber management team and SAM'S CLUB frozen food buyer Vicki Belcher, have forged a uniquely creative collaboration. This is a model of how an imaginative buyer, who really understands what her Members are looking for – paired with a cooperative, responsive manufacturer – can bring products to market that are customized for Members' needs. Constantly striving to push the envelope with bold new ethnic flavor profiles and ingredient combinations, they provide products that put Members right on target with emerging food trends. One of these custom products developed just for SAM'S CLUB, Coconut Curry Tenders with Spicy Peanut Dipping Sauce, will be in Clubs by the end of the year.



Photo: Cliff Walk Trail, Cape Elizabeth, Maine

Barber Foods is also on the cutting edge when it comes to caring for their associates. They are one of the most highly regarded employers in Maine for good reason. Since 1992, they have offered complimentary classes at the plant in computer

skills, math, English as a second language, science and citizenship. Many associates also take advantage of the financial assistance they provide for classes taken at two local colleges. Since 2002, Barber Foods has invested more than \$2 million in various associate training programs. Barber Foods also supports an associate-directed wellness program, which provides opportunities and incentives for associates to take steps toward improving their health and well-being.

And, there's something else about how Barber Foods supports their associates that is special. As the son of Armenian immigrants, Gus Barber knew firsthand how difficult it could be to establish a new life in a new country. As a result, he began an ongoing tradition at Barber of offering employment to immigrants (especially refugees from war-torn countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Cambodia and Bosnia). Today, almost half of the Barber associates are foreign-born with a remarkable 48 nations represented and a level of associate loyalty and camaraderie that resonates throughout the plant.

This began as one brave man's dream of creating a wonderful life for his family while treating customers and associates with integrity. Today, his children and hundreds of proud associates carry on his vision of a business built

on family values, kindness, hard work, fun and a product that is simply the best. **S**

