

BOENING BROS.



50 YEARS SELLING MILLER ... *Boening Bros., Inc., in Lindenhurst, N.Y., recently celebrated 50 years as a Miller distributor. Above, President Harold "Hap" Boening, who joined the organization in 1950, speaks to employees. Boening says the employees are the company's greatest asset.*

Boening Bros. celebrates 50 years

By Mary Hopkins

At Boening Bros., Inc., they're looking forward to 2000, but they are also celebrating past achievements. The distributor in North Lindenhurst, N.Y., on Long Island, recently celebrated 50 years as a Miller distributorship and almost 100 years in business.

Boening Bros. traces its history back to 1901 when Philip Boening, a farmer in Rosedale, Queens, used horse-drawn wagons to haul spent grain from breweries in Brooklyn and Manhattan to feed his livestock. Soon, neighbors began asking Boening to pick up beer as long as he was at the brewery. From that neighborliness was born a beer distributorship that is now Boening Bros., Inc. and Oak Beverage, Inc., in Blauvelt, N.Y.

Boening's first customers were local farmers, hotels, inns and general stores. The business and the family grew through the First World War and the Roaring Twenties. During Prohibition, Boening Bros. sold "near beer" and soft drinks and introduced Pepsi Cola™ to Long Island. After the repeal of Prohibition in April 1933, the company was ready to go with a fleet of 10 trucks and a crew of local farm boys as drivers.

Boening Bros. became Miller's Long Island wholesaler on July 1, 1949, when Philip Boening's son, Harry, was president. Harry was the father of the current president, Harold "Hap" Boening, who joined the organization in 1950. Boening has worked at Boening Bros. continuously since then, except during 1952 and 1953 when he was in military service during the Korean War.

"There's been just a tremendous amount of evolution in the business since

that time," Hap Boening said in a recent interview. "Beer is still beer, no doubt about that. But I recently took a look at an original letter to Boening Bros. from the Miller Brewing Company dated 1949, in which it listed the one brand and two packages available. It was Miller High Life in either a 12-ounce longneck returnable bottle or a six and one-half-ounce returnable bottle that came 36 in a case. There were no cans. Everything arrived by rail from Milwaukee."

When Boening began his beer business career nearly a half-century ago, pallets were not used. "We used to unload the rail cars by hand, then load the product onto our trucks and cart it to our warehouse. Then we distributed it to our accounts in Nassau County and Queens, our original territory," Boening explained.

"I've really enjoyed the business," he continued. "Tip O'Neill said 'All politics is local.' Well, that's true of the beer business, too. Just look at how and where products are sold. Each region has its own distinct idiosyncrasies and opportunities. In New York, for example, there are many new immigrants from a lot of different countries. It's our job to learn how to deal with these different pockets of nationalities. We hire from the local population, which helps us drive our business. But it also helps us do what I call working within the framework of the framework. It's not enough to say that you have a large Hispanic market, for example. You have to know the individual markets within that segment. You have to know the unique characteristics of the Dominicans as opposed to the Puerto Ricans or Salvadorans. And that's where our biggest asset we have as a company comes in to play – our people."

Among the people at the company are his children. "My daughter is a vice presi-

dent and operates Oak Beverage, and my son is here at Boening," Hap said. "They both do an excellent job. I have two other daughters who are attorneys and another daughter who does bookkeeping at our recycling center. They're all good people. I've surrounded myself with good people."

Several Boening Bros. employees have been with the company for over 50 years. "We have employees who have spent their entire working lives in our employ," Boening said. "One of the reasons we've been able to build such a strong business is our strong continuity of personnel. Some of our retailers bought from my father, and now they know me and buy from me. There are thousands of little retailers in our market and you've got to have some kind of relationship with every one of them. You can accomplish that through continuity of good personnel."

Although Boening Bros. operations are in good hands, he still comes in to the office and makes retail calls. "That's my favorite part of the business: going out and meeting retailers and selling product. I'm a salesman at heart," he said. "The salesman is a very instrumental part of any operation. Selling influences production, after all. If I'm able to sell someone a product, someone else is able to produce that product. I think the key to success for any operation like this is good salesmanship along with continuity and, of course, integrity."

Boening has proven his integrity to not only his retailers, but to his peers as well. He is presently a member of the board of directors of the National Beer Wholesalers Association™, and a past president of the New York State Beer Wholesalers™. In 1990, Boening was awarded the SAMMY™ Award as distributor of the year, an honor that had been bestowed upon his father 18 years earlier.

New York Market Area