

The spice of RVA life

For more than 125 years, Sauer's has been a Richmond institution and Southern ingredient

Promotional feature by Harrison Gregory. Photos courtesy of Sauer's.

The housewives arrived at the pharmacy, one after another, to have their own bottles filled with flavoring extracts. At the time, drugstores offered products containing higher levels of purity and strength than what the women could find anywhere else. A teenaged Conrad Frederick Sauer worked closely with these customers and saw firsthand the demand that cried out to be met. On Oct. 13, 1887, at 17th and Broad streets in Richmond, C.F. Sauer founded a company that specialized in making pre-packaged flavoring extracts more readily available. It was the young entrepreneur's 21st birthday.



More than 125 years later, the company that Sauer founded is a fourth generation business that still carries his name, and its headquarters, located at 2000 W. Broad St., has never left the city of Richmond.

"Local people have a very strong association with Sauer's," said Erin Hatcher, brand manager for many

of Sauer's retail products, including Duke's Mayonnaise, Sauer's Spices and The Spice Hunter.

"Whether it's the iconic sign that graces Broad Street or smelling the aroma of vanilla and pepper that emanates from our buildings, Richmonders have unique and special experiences with our company."

Hatcher also emphasized that Sauer's, with its more than 175 Broad Street employees, is a really unique place to work. "Many of our employees have been with the company for longer than 20 years, which is pretty unheard of," she said. At the 125th anniversary party in 2012, the company invited long-time employees to stand, and some had been a part of the company for more than 40 years. "Much like the Sauers themselves, employees have had many generations of their families work here," Hatcher said. Conrad Sauer IV has been attributed with the following in reference to his father Conrad (Connie) Sauer III and the nature of the company's business: "He gave his employees tremendous responsibility, the tools to do the job, and then let them do it."

Sauer's is also heavily involved in the community, though you won't necessarily hear about that publicly. According to Hatcher, "The Sauer family supports many different causes. They have been good neighbors to businesses around the area and helped enhance various parts of the city." For example, Sauer Properties, led by vice president and great-great grandson Bradford B. Sauer, developed the popular Carytown destination Cary Court and was instrumental in the arrival of businesses such as Can Can Brasserie. "The Sauers didn't flee to the suburbs," said Hatcher. "Sauer's has played a vital part in the city's progress."



Sauer's employees sorted whole nutmegs by hand during the early 1950s.

The impressive products are a critical component as well. "I think Richmonders realize that Sauer's was authentic before that was fashionable," said Hatcher. "We remain true to our products and the promise of quality and purity in those products. That means something to our customers."

As much as Sauer's is connected to Richmond's past, the company understands the importance of adapting and moving forward into the future. Sauer Properties is helping to manage the arrival of Whole Foods in the company-owned Pleasants Hardware location on Broad. And Hatcher sees great growth potential with both the Duke's Mayonnaise brand and the spice business as well. In the future, the company expects to make inroads in both the North and West. "We're not leaving our Southern roots, but we are expanding," Hatcher explained. "It's an exciting time. The local changes will bring new opportunities to parts of the city that have been lacking. I see all kinds of positive advancements happening in the area."

