

William Sambrailo dead at age 76

Ag pioneer widely known for clamshell packaging design

By RYAN PANLILIO
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

William King Sambrailo, a key figure in agricultural produce packaging, died Saturday while on a ski trip in Wyoming. He was 76.

Born to Charles and Henrietta King Sambrailo, both of immigrant families, Mr. Sambrailo was raised in a small house on Lincoln Street in Watsonville until the family moved to Hecker Pass in 1947. He graduated from Watsonville High School in 1945, where he played scat-back on the football team and was a hurdler on the track team. He attempted to enter the military but was barred due to his asthma.

Mr. Sambrailo graduated from Santa Clara University in 1950 with a degree in business. While there, he played running back on the football team, which played in the Orange Bowl.

Last year, he received the

2003 Al Smith Friend of Agriculture Award. The award is given to someone who is not in production agriculture, but has done much for the industry, Jess Brown of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau said.

"(Mr. Sambrailo) was well thought of by everybody in the agriculture industry," Brown said. "He was a very unique and wonderful individual with a great sense of humor."

The reason the Sambrailo Paper Company has stayed in business for so long is because of how they adapted to the changing agriculture industry, Brown said.

Mr. Sambrailo's father, Charles Sambrailo, started the business in Watsonville in 1923. Mr. Sambrailo inherited the company with his brother Chuck upon their father's death in 1963 and ran the company as an entrepreneur and inventor.

See SAMBRAILO, page 2

SAMBRAILO

From page 1

Mr. Sambrailo invented new corrugated tray designs for use in selling produce, increasing its marketability and shelf life.

He also started Samco Plastics, which made the green mesh baskets that were in use for 20 years until his clamshell invention entered the market in 1987.

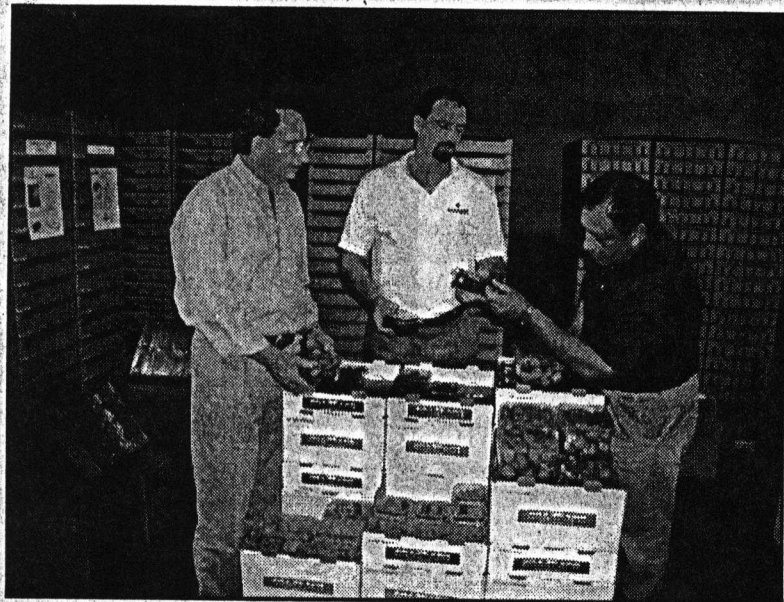
The clamshell design was the result of a joint idea with Driscoll's Strawberry associates for packaging raspberries. Mr. Sambrailo kept alive the company's 60-year relationship with Driscoll Strawberries, a relationship that was started in his father's era.

Clamshells have changed the way the nation's berries and produce are packaged. They are now used to package strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, cherries, grapes, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, peas, peppers, okra and other items.

Besides holding numerous patents on the innovative clamshell design, the company also holds a patent to a packaging system called MIXIM. MIXIM packages fit into a pallet with better space efficiency and less bruising on the produce.

Sambrailo was a wonderful businessman, Nita Gizdich of Gizdich Ranch in Watsonville said. He would tell Gizdich what kind of box or label to use in the packaging at her family's apple business, she said, adding that she believes that is how local business should be conducted. The Gizdich's have been in business for 50 years.

Mr. Sambrailo was also a founding director of Pajaro Valley Bank from 1983-1991 and later became director with the new bank owner, First National Bank, from 1991-2001. He was a member of the Pa-



Register-Pajaronian file photo

Sambrailo Packaging Board Chairman William Sambrailo (left), son and company President and CEO Mark Sambrailo and Vice President for New Produce Sales and Marketing Tony Cadiante inspect clamshell-packaged strawberries prior to shipment last year.

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— Jess Brown

jaro Valley Historical Association and the Watsonville Chapter of the Elks Club, director of the original Pop Warner Pajaro Valley Packers football club and chaperone of Watsonville High's Snocatzi ski club trips for many years.

When not tending to his busi-

ness, Mr. Sambrailo enjoyed skiing, biking, hang gliding, kayaking, marathon walking, hiking and much more. He was part of the Mt. Kilimanjaro millennium climb in 2000, which claimed the lives of two fellow climbers. While on a ski trip at Salt Lake Olympics in 2002, he broke his ankle while imitating Johnny Mosley in the moguls. He loved skiing, took advantage of the senior discount and had not missed a year of skiing in 62 seasons.

"If you wanted a friend on the slopes, he was there to help," Gizdich said.

Mr. Sambrailo left behind his wife, Eileen Bromber Sambrailo; three children, Mark, Judy and Michael from his first wife, Nancy Bentley; and seven grandchildren.

Funeral services for Mr. Sambrailo will be held at a later time.