

'Brains' behind Ferrell's dies

Family scion doughnut mastermind

By **DAN WHITE**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Decades before Santa Cruz became a city of tempeh and tofu, the Ferrell family fried doughnuts by the millions.

Christine Elizabeth Ferrell, who died Sunday at age 86, was



FERRELL

Ferrell's family called her "the brains behind the operation," a bookkeeper and cook who knew a good cruller when she tasted one.

Her husband, the late Ernest

part of a snack-food mini-empire that still extends countywide with five stores, though the Ferrells no longer own them.

P. Ferrell, founded the first Ferrell's shop in 1951 at Water and Magnolia streets. In the mini-chain's heyday, the Ferrells started cooking at midnight and could move as many as 500 dozen in a day from one store.

There was more to Christine Ferrell than wheel-shaped snacks. Ferrell, who died in Sun City, Ariz., was known for volunteer work and her love of animals. She enjoyed traveling to Lake Tahoe and Las Vegas. Her son, Ed Ferrell, 66, now a Harbor High School wrestling coach, said she and Ernest

were "like Ozzie and Harriet. She raised four children. She had a lot on her plate."

But she was devoted to a store that was part of "old" Santa Cruz. Those were the days when a doughnut shop served many functions. Sometimes the Santa Cruz City

See **FERRELL** on **BACK PAGE**

Christine Ferrell helps husband Ernest cool off after a hot night in the bakery.

Contributed photo



Ferrell

Continued from Page A1

Council held brief, dull meetings at doughnut counters.

"There wasn't much to talk about," Ed Ferrell said. "They drank a lot of coffee."

It was a time when "junk food" was not a hot topic. It was an age when Ferrell's regulars weren't afraid to eat the specialty: a jelly doughnut dunked in chocolate and rolled in peanuts.

"It's kind of sad to see those days go by," Ed Ferrell said. "Now it's a bigger town, and people don't know each other so well. These days, you go into a business, and it's, 'Pay me and here's

your hamburger now.'"

The Ferrells' doughnut business success followed a national trend in the '50s. According to an article by Smithsonian Institution scholar and "food collections" expert David Shayt, businesses such as the original Krispy Kreme chain catered to ravenous Baby Boomers and their demand for post-war finger food.

Even then, Ferrell's was something of a throwback. In the age of the Krispy Kreme "wonder doughnut machine," which could crank out 800 dozen doughnuts in one hour, Ferrell's bakers initially made them all by hand.

In the early days, Ferrell's ruled the Monterey Bay doughnut market, selling to schools, Wrigley factory employees, firefighters and county workers.

Once, they catered a locally filmed installment of the "Lassie" heroic dog series, and served up coffee to Alfred Hitchcock, who once walked in to the shop at Water and Magnolia streets with Cary Grant.

Christine lived in a family house connected directly to the shop.

"She'd just come out the front door and walk right into the doughnut shop," Ed said.

It was hard work, but Ed remembered his mom as an optimist: "If you were to say to her now, 'The president is a rat,' she'd say to you, 'He's doing the best he can, he's trying.' If it was raining, she'd say, 'The sun's coming out in the afternoon.' That's the kind of person she was."

In later years, Ernest and Christine stepped away from the business. But the couple grew antsy, and later returned. For a while, Ernest and son Ed ran separate doughnut outfits. To prevent confusion, Ernest called his business The Original Ferrell's.

Ernest Ferrell died in 1978.

Ed sold the business in 1986.

Christine Ferrell is survived by sons Ernest Edward Ferrell of Santa Cruz and Frederick Perry Ferrell of Edmonds, Wash., and daughter Jean Alice Price of Missouri.

Services will be private.

Contact Dan White at
dwhite@santa-cruz.com.