

EDDIE'S OF ROLAND PARK

Impeccable customer service combined with superior quality groceries has always been the hallmark of Eddie's of Roland Park. Serving two locations in North Baltimore, this upscale neighborhood grocery store has been in operation for over 59 years. Three generations of shoppers (often in the same family) realize that Eddie's success began with its founder, Victor Cohen. His business philosophy of providing the best quality goods and services at a fair price is still maintained by his daughter, Nancy.

In 1944, customers were greeted by name at the market's doors and their children were offered Dad's Oatmeal Cookies. This tradition continues today with a personal greeting at the door and delicious cookies from their in-store bakery.

The roots of Eddie's of Roland Park began with a Jewish Russian immigrant who came to Ellis Island from Kiev, Russia. He began his grocery career at age 14, delivering groceries to neighbors of the A&P where he worked in Baltimore. At age 19 Victor became the youngest store manager in the chain's history. In 1944 he fulfilled his dream of opening a gourmet market—Victor's

A young Victor Cohen at the original Victor's Market as featured in Food World.



Nancy Cohen, president and CEO of Eddie's of Roland Park.

Market—in a shopping center in North Baltimore designed by Frederick Law Olmstead. In fact, Victor's was in the nation's first shopping center.

Nine years later, he opened a second store called Eddie's, in the same neighborhood. That store, with expansions, remains today. As in his original store, "Mr. Victor" maintained his tradition of providing the best groceries, and prime meats, along with personal shopping and delivery to his customers. The same attention to detail and service is in evidence today as Nancy Cohen, Mr. Cohen's daughter and now president and owner of Eddie's of Roland Park, continues to operate the stores with her father's dedication and care.

Going into the grocery business was never Nancy's plan. Her one foray as a teenager into the world of groceries lasted all of an hour and a half. This confirmed her father's belief that girls and the grocery business were mutually exclusive. Ms. Cohen pursued her own passions and completed a master's degree in clinical psychology. While completing that degree she worked for an agency that provided vocational counseling for the physically and mentally challenged. Pressure from relatives persuaded her to delay Ph.D. studies and give her father's business—

her family's business—a second chance.

In 1981 she joined her father at the door of Eddie's. Her father informed her that her one and only task was to stand at the door and greet people. Ms. Cohen laughs when she remembers her indignation at that assignment: she said, "I have a college degree, I have a master's degree! You want me to open a door?" Now, however, she clearly sees the wisdom in her father's methods of running the store. For the next several years, Nancy Cohen absorbed as much about the grocery business and her customers as possible, learning both from her father and his many longtime associates.

Within two years she started incorporating her own ideas into the store's operation. She updated the logo, created a unique circular, and further distinguished Eddie's by adding "of Roland Park" to its name. Facing new competition from chain stores entering the market, she refocused on Eddie's with the eyes of a customer. Typical of many women, she too worked full-time and needed to feed her family at the end of a long day. Nancy expanded an already busy kitchen by hiring a chef to create

and prepare à la carte meals for busy families. Eddie's of Roland Park was the first supermarket in Baltimore to offer freshly prepared meal options. Now the Gourmet to Go counter has a menu offering over 300 items.

Many of the additions and changes Nancy made at Eddie's occurred during her father's winter vacations in Florida. She had instincts she trusted but didn't want the confrontations that would often ensue when she tried to sell her father on her newest ideas. With innovations already in place upon her father's return, he could only say, "I hope you know what you're doing."

Ultimately, Nancy's accomplishments brought her father great pride. By 1991 she was running the business—with her father still very much involved. That same year, while her father was in Florida, Nancy decided to open a second location only 2 miles from the original Eddie's. Stunned and not at all happy, her father told her to "un-sign" the purchase contract. Nancy responded with the drive and determination typical of her father. When confronted by his own dynamic characteristics in his daughter, what else could he do but repeat his mantra: "I hope you know what you're doing." She did. The second store is larger and busier, offering a greater depth of products and services. Both stores

Inside the original Victor's Market.



continue to offer everything from imported specialty foods to gift shops, from service meats, fish, poultry and game, to customer-oriented services that include catering, personal shopping and home delivery.

With the success of the second Eddie's, at North Charles Street, Ms. Cohen proved to those in the grocery business that in fact she was her father's daughter. As the only female CEO of a group of supermarkets in the Mid-Atlantic region, Nancy Cohen continues to keep Eddie's prominently situated within the male dominated grocery business.

Beyond its customer-driven niche as a purveyor of fine foods, Eddie's of Roland

Eddie's of Roland Park 6213 North Charles Street location.

Park is also a dedicated member of the community. Of her service philosophy, Nancy says, "I am committed to the community in a larger way by making significant and meaningful contributions to local schools, churches, synagogues and civic causes in our community and the city at large.

"We get involved in neighborhood beautification projects and we carefully maintain the properties from which we do business. But our *most* important assets in cementing community relationships are our associates."

Still enthusiastically involved with the business he founded, Victor Cohen passed away in 2000 at the age of 88. Even as they mourned "Mr. Victor," customers and associates alike were comforted by their trust that his spirit would live on in his daughter.

To her delight, Nancy's sons Michael and Andrew can't wait to enter the family business. They grew up visiting the stores frequently and witnessing the excitement of the entire operation. With every new product's presentation, and the warm greeting of every customer, Eddie's remains a Baltimore institution.