

## **SINGLE USE FOODSERVICE PRODUCTS:** **THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY'S QUIET LITTLE MIRACLE**

As the gurus made their lists of the most important achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and/or the millennium, it's doubtful that anybody's list will include the invention of single-use foodservice packaging.

But maybe the gurus should think about that a little more.

When you really think it through, you realize that single-use foodservice products have changed the way people are protected from disease, eat and live and even cook in America... and throughout the world.

Hugh Moore and his brother-in-law Robert Luellen commercialized the first single-use paper cup around 1909. Their invention responded to laws banning public common drinking cups in Kansas and other places where the spread of contagious diseases, like tuberculosis was on the rampage. Moore's "Health Kup" sold for a penny at dispensers situated next to public drinking fountains.

In short order, other single-use products, like paper plates and wooden cutlery, found their way into hospitals, schools, and other large-scale feeding venues where protecting public health was a primary concern.

In the 1930s, single-use products found their way into the rural bridge and dam

construction projects of the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps where isolation and scarce water supplies made use of permanent were difficult.

Those same factors made single-use products perfect for the mobile kitchens that fed work crews 24 hours day at industrial war plants trying to equip Allied troops for the war in Europe.

And when the troops returned home, they found single-use packaging expanding into a number of new applications: meat containers and trays, egg cartons, aluminum foil and pans and "revolutionary" inventions such as the soft drink vending machine that mixed your beverage in a cup that magically appeared from inside the machine.

Paper had the foodservice packaging market all to itself by the time the 1960s rock and rolled around. But then polystyrene foam and other plastics appeared on the single-use product scene forever changing the industry.

Why? Because demographic changes in our society demand that the foodservice industry, and therefore its packaging, keep up with the changing needs of today's consumers. With a growing number of single

households (whether these people are "never-marrieds, divorced or senior citizens), working women and dual-income families, consumers are looking more and more to the foodservice industry for help in feeding themselves and their families. They have more choices than ever before when it comes to "ready-to-eat" or "ready-to-heat" meals. The options range from picking up something at a traditional foodservice establishment to ordering meals over the Internet for delivery. Whether it's called "home meal replacement", "convenient meal solutions", or simply "take-out" what makes these options possible is single-use foodservice packaging.

Packaging manufacturers are working so ensure that the packaging needs of both the operators and the ultimate end-users, the consumers, are met. Operators-and their distributors-are learning that the packaging is an integral part of their business and are paying closer attention to the packaging they choose for their products. In addition to keeping "hot" items "hot" and "cold" items "cold", plus avoiding spills and leaks during the transport of the foods and beverages, operators and consumers are making more sophisticated demands on these packages.

New technology is helping to meet those demands. Whether it's an anti-fogging agent that allows consumers to see the foods they are purchasing or advanced technology that allows Packaging materials to "breathe" and extend the shelf life of a product for operators, manufacturers are keeping up with demands from the foodservice industry. As with other industries, the foodservice and packaging industry will continue to see new technology emerge as manufacturers develop new products together with the help of their suppliers and customers.

We believe Hugh Moore would be proud of all that has been accomplished by the industry since 1909. To celebrate the industry's many achievements and contributions to every day life during the twentieth century FPI will sponsor the first-ever-foodservice packaging award program next year. A panel of judges will crown the *Foodservice Package/Machine of the Century Award*, as well as seven *Best of the Best Awards*. All manufacturers of foodservice packaging and non-members of FPI – who operate in the U.S. and Canada, are invited to participate.

distribute single-use foodservice packaging products. For more information, contact FPI by mail at 1550 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 701, Arlington, VA, 22209, telephone 703/527-7505, fax 703/527-7512, e-mail [fpi@fpi.org](mailto:fpi@fpi.org), or on the web at [www.fpi.org](http://www.fpi.org).

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