



TASTE

S U C C E S S

Taste of History

PETER PRUDEN III HAS BEEN A LEADER IN THE LOCAL FOOD INDUSTRY FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS

By Barrett Baker

There's a photo on the wall in the dining area of the newest Taste Unlimited store in Norfolk that depicts a row of men standing behind a meat case filled with Pruden Packing Company's Peanut City brand hams. The caption explains that the picture was taken in 1955 at Bazemore's Friendly Market—on the very site where the new Norfolk Taste store and company headquarters are located.

The truly interesting story behind the photo is that the Pruden family, the same one that once supplied hams to the quaint Norfolk market, now owns Taste Unlimited and the recently renovated building where the market once stood, carrying on the tradition of providing fine foods and personal service to the people of Hampton Roads.

Peter Pruden III, who purchased Taste Unlimited with his son Jon in 2006, is quick to direct attention to the photo and its historic links. He has been in the food industry for more than 40 years and is utilizing his extensive experience to continue his family's legacy.

Hampton Roads Magazine: Tell us a little about your history.

Peter Pruden III: My father and grandfather were in the meat packing industry and both were involved with the founding of what is now Smithfield Foods. Simultaneously they had Pruden Packing in Suffolk. So my background was in the food industry. After I graduated from the University of Richmond, I came back to Suffolk and went into the family business. I left that and went into banking for

a while, then came back in 1980 when I purchased the family business. I soon took on some partners and formed a new business called The Smithfield Companies. Over the next 20 years we bought and sold a dozen or so small specialty food businesses that stretched from New Orleans, where we had a cooking school, to Williamsburg, where we had a peanut company. We took the company public in 1989 and sold it to Smithfield Foods in 2001.

HRM: After you sold the Smithfield Companies, you went into semi-retirement. What were you doing in the interim before acquiring Taste Unlimited?

PPIII: One of the first things I did was to put together a group of investors and buy a 90-year-old food company in Norfolk

called Old Dominion Peanut Company. I am still involved in that business, and it continues to be successful with a wide customer base across the U.S. My son Jon always wanted to run his own business, so when the opportunity to buy Taste Unlimited was made known to him, we put our thoughts together and purchased it. It's been delightful running this company with Jon, his wife, Tracie, and my other son Taylor, who are all actively involved in the business. We have had success running this as a true family business. As a result, Taste Unlimited was named one of the 2009 Top Five Specialty Food Retailers in the nation.

HRM: And you wrote a book?

PPH: Yes, I wrote a book about the Pruden family. I had done a lot of research and worked on it for about four years. It's a genealogical book on the Prudens in Virginia and North Carolina. I'm very proud of it.

HRM: You have also served on a number of boards, correct?

PPH: Yes, among other things I was Chairman of the Board of The Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts. That was one of the most worthwhile civic endeavors I've ever been involved in. It was a \$20 million renovation of a 1922 school building, which was a huge undertaking by volunteers. The professionals came in later to actually create the vibrant center for the arts.

HRM: What makes you so successful?

PPH: I have always loved business, and I love the food business in particular. Over the years I have developed a number of relationships with customers and suppliers—and it's always nice to be around people who enjoy the industry and great food and wine.

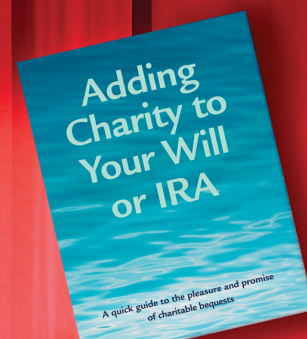
HRM: Aside from family history, what makes Hampton Roads so special to you?

PPH: One of my hobbies is sailing, and the area certainly lends itself to that. But I also truly consider myself a citizen of Hampton Roads. I've lived in Suffolk, Portsmouth and Virginia Beach. I have had business interest in Suffolk, Smithfield, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach and Norfolk. I have served on several regional boards including the Virginia Port Authority, Sentara Healthcare and Hampton Roads Sanitation Commission, which has given me exposure to the charm and character that makes Hampton Roads unique. This lifetime of widespread, first-hand experiences across Hampton Roads has given me a keen appreciation and fondness for the character and charm that make Hampton Roads so unique. **HRM**



So, you love the arts? Make sure the music never ends.

Leave a gift in your will
for your favorite arts organization.



Learn how easy it is.
757-622-7951 or leaveabequest.org



Hampton Roads
Community Foundation

Inspiring Philanthropy. Changing Lives.