

IMAGES, ETHNICITY, GENDER

Snap, Crackle, Pop for Fitness and Sport: The Kellogg Legacy

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The morning diet of countless people in 130 countries includes a product from W.K. Kellogg. Behind this identifiable trademark is the story of a corporation whose image has consistently encompassed sports, recreation for families, good nutrition and wellness. The creation of that imagery was the focus of this study. With visual authentication from company archives, we can trace (1) the approach this renowned company has taken in the realm of health and fitness, as well as some of (2) the Kellogg family heritage.

As pioneers the family moved from Massachusetts to Michigan in 1834 where John Preston Kellogg sired a family of 16 children. Two sons became MDs; one, John Harvey, directed the Seventh Day Adventist Sanitarium ("San") in Battle Creek. By the 1880s the "San" was a famed health spa attracting world-wide clients, treating up to 5000 patients yearly by the turn of the century. With a regimen of diet, exercise and nutrition it also offered Schools of Nursing, Home Economics and Physical Culture.

Dr. Kellogg's newly married younger brother Will Keith was hired as a bookkeeper at the "San" in 1880. To enliven the institution's dietary fare, over 100 health foods were created at the "San" between 1895 & 1905. The Battle Creek area experienced a cereal boom (42 companies) likened to the Texas oil strike or Florida real estate growth of the 1920s. Will quarreled with Dr. John, quit after 22 1/2 years, worked briefly in a cereal plant, and formed his own company in 1906. Keen business acumen led one writer to state, "What Henry Ford did for the automobile industry, Will Kellogg did for the food business."

W.K. made early and extensive use of the advertising media; e.g. papers, car cards, magazines and billboards, radio in 1931, and TV starting in 1949. High quality graphic arts and videos in corporate archives reveal a continual thematic emphasis on sports, fitness and health. With an early assist from the NCR model in Dayton, Kellogg provided a functional, aesthetic workplace and social/recreational opportunities for men and women employees. Highlights were family-centered annual outings

beginning in 1910, daycare centers for children of working mothers in the 1920s, and sport leagues for all employees from the '20s and '30s until the present. Sponsorships included the first Company baseball team in 1919, Campfire Girls' programs, Chautauquas, dances, concerts, a Comiskey Park baseball school, Pitch-Hit-Run competition, amateur baseball leading to the Stan Musial World Series, charity events, modern corporate Olympics and the 1984 USA Olympic team. Interest in educational materials, backing for sport clinics/events, and concern for wellness are exposed via the posters, ads, promos, and literature of the Kellogg Company. Will Keith was an early leader in promoting foreign markets. By 1924 plants were in Canada and Australia, with England added in 1938. Today, there are sites in 22 states and 30 countries from Argentina to Spain. The recreational programs nourished in Battle Creek have found their way into the family-oriented aspects of these diverse areas. It is, in sum, a miniature view of American tastes, interfacing with international interest groups. Today, at the World Headquarters a professionally-staffed fitness program is available to all employees. The commitment endures!

While values may not easily emerge from corporate archival files, they do appear. For instance, in addition to providing early-century opportunities for females in league sports, the Company by the mid 1920s scheduled teams from the first "colored" baseball league. This led to racially integrated teams representing Kellogg in city recreation; e.g. early 1950s basketball and softball teams. In 1953 the Kellogg Sportsmen Club backed a boys' cub baseball team. Their operative value system is apparent through the boys' practice of repeating in unison before each game, "Win or lose, let it be said we did our best and played like true sportsmen."

Behind corporate values and structure is the life story of its founder: enigmatic, introverted, energetic Will Keith Kellogg. Family tragedies, alienation, and a lack of formal education combine to form a backdrop to a remarkable career. Mixing a shy personality with Hollywood stars and enormous, if unexpected, wealth produced a fascinating blend of events. The charitable philosophy inherent in W.K. Kellogg's makeup has left an indelible impact on his community and, through the Foundation bearing his name, the world.

The case can clearly be made that the Kellogg Company has maintained and earned a reputation for community involvement and a commitment to health and fitness. Its 83 year history verifies this. One might conclude that this modern enterprise with its proud heritage is a model worth emulating. It has a genuine Snap, Crackle, Pop—or, as its Mexican employees might state, Pim, Pum, Pam—investing in its employees.