

# PORTICO

MAY/JUNE 2019



## CELEBRATIONS

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+PRIMOS CELEBRATES 90 YEARS

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Celebrating 90 Years of

# "Goodness Around the Table"

A strong work ethic, quality service, a fun, family-friendly atmosphere and excellent food was the vision of Angelo "Pop" Primos. Today his family continues the tradition.

BY LAURA LEE LEATHERS

PHOTOS PROVIDED



It's that time of year, "April showers bring May flowers!" Many people are busy planting flowers in their gardens. Wherever you are in your planting skills, you know everything begins with a seed. Then, once it is planted in the warm moist soil, the seed starts to sprout. Producing a plant which requires tending and nurturing, and dealing with the environment which you have no control over. After all of your hard work and patience, the day arrives when the plant begins to produce the harvest to be enjoyed.

It is when a vision is born in a person's heart and mind. There's a seed, an idea planted, and for it to come to fruition it takes creativity, knowledge, diligence and the ability to deal with things beyond one's control. However, not everyone has the calling to be a visionary. According to Merriam-Webster's Internet Dictionary, a visionary is "one having unusual foresight and imagination." This is the driving force inside an individual which says this idea is possible, it can be done. Usually, as the concept germinates, it produces a passion deep within a person's soul. It is the driving force which creates and implements a plan, and then through hard work, the vision becomes a reality.

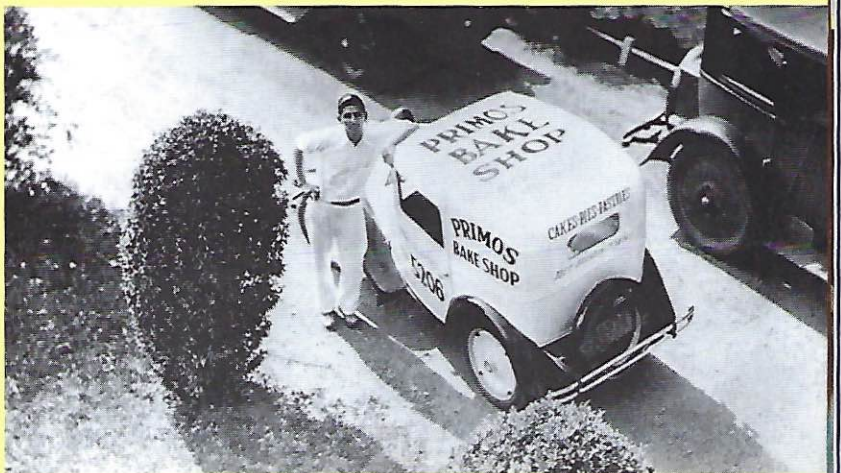
### Humble Beginnings

Angelo "Pop" Primos was a man with a vision. He and his mother, Yia Yia and other relatives, came to the United States as Greek immigrants, arriving in New Orleans when he was 15. The new arrivals made their home with other family members who had come before. Pop, as he was lovingly referred to, found a job working in a bakery. He was talented, creative and hard-working. Several years later he met and married a French woman named Mildred, later known as "Mom." In the years ahead, their family grew to seven, with the births of four boys and one girl.

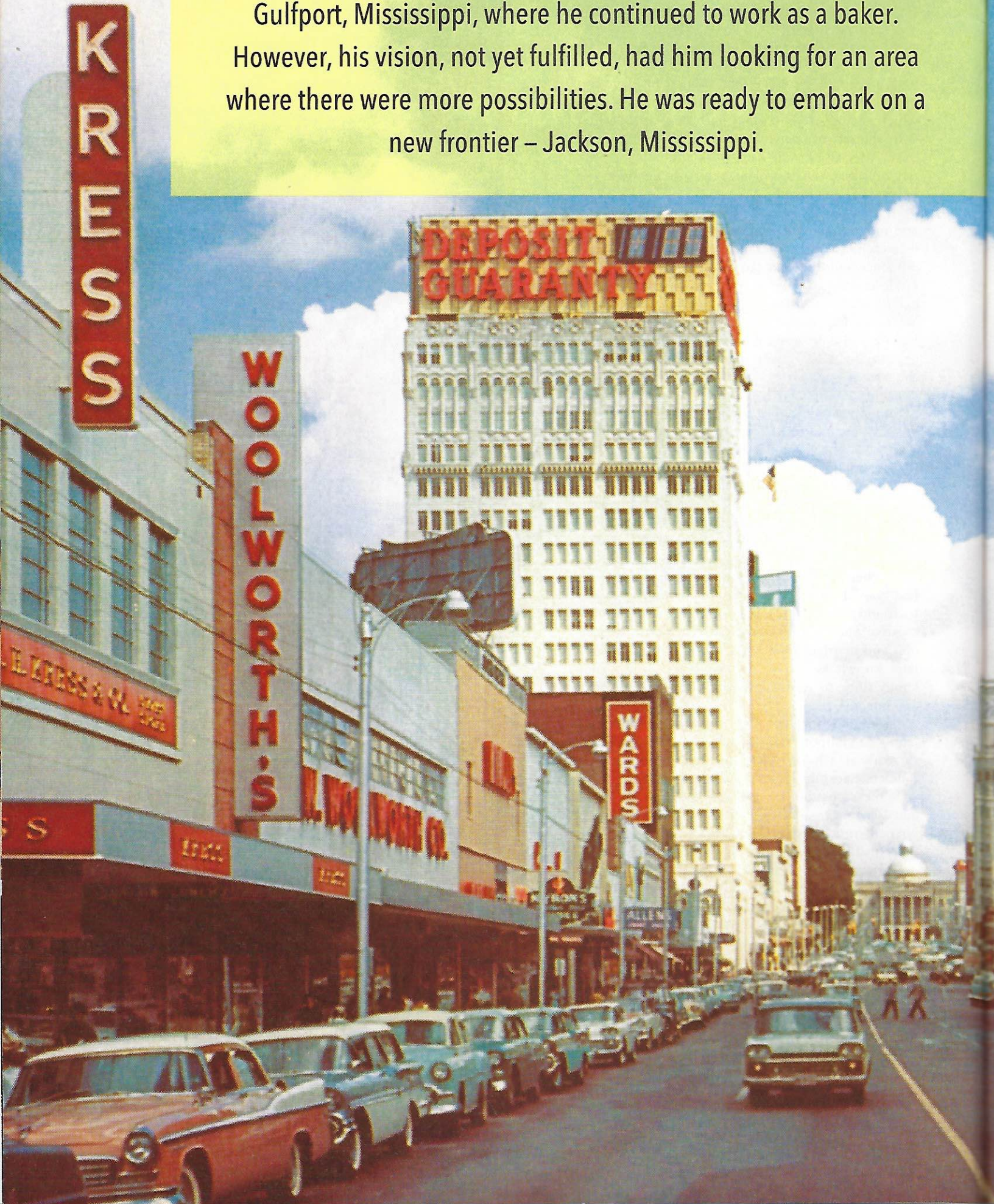
From New Orleans, Pop and Mom moved their family to Gulfport, Mississippi, where he continued to work as a baker. However, his vision, not yet fulfilled, had him looking for an area where there were more possibilities. He was ready to embark on a new frontier — Jackson, Mississippi. In 1929 Pop opened Primos Bake Shop at 236 East Capitol Street. Later in the year Mildred and the children joined him. Then the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, and the world was about to change. Making a living from the Bake Shop for his growing family took hard work, a grueling schedule and much sacrifice. With the downward trend in the economy, Pop embraced the challenge by adding new items to the menu, all in the hopes of generating more business.

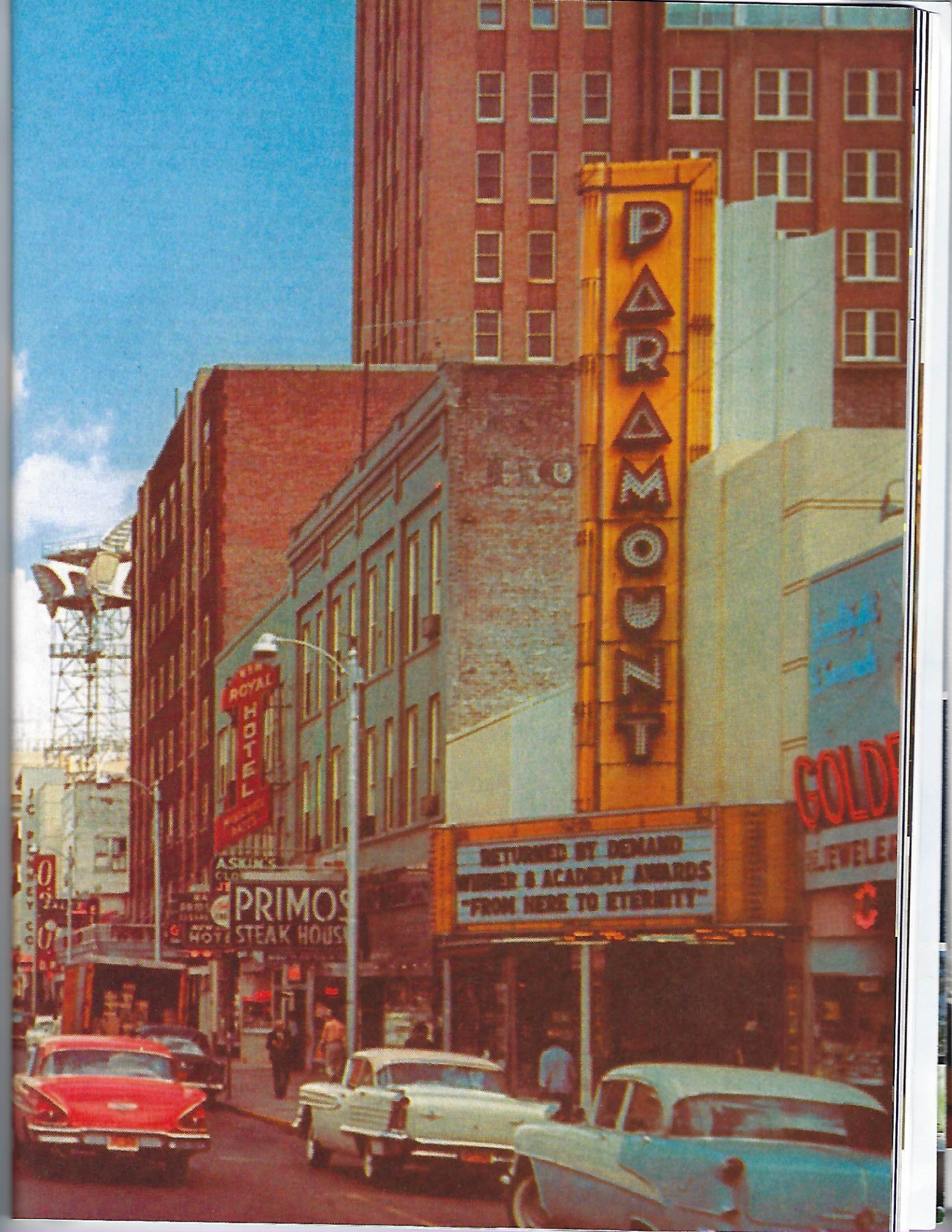
### Building the Foundation

In 1933, having made it through half of the Great Depression, Pop decided it was time for expansion. He visited Westbrook Manufacturing, a restaurant equipment company. With \$100 in his pocket, he



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ROYAL  
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STEAK HOUSE

RETURNED BY DEMAND  
WINNER 8 ACADEMY AWARDS  
"FROM HERE TO ETERNITY"

GOLD  
JEWELRY





made a down payment on equipment and expanded into a full-service restaurant called Primos Cafe' and Bake Shop. But it would be 1939 before the business would actually be considered successful.

Then, it was time to move the business to 244 East Capitol Street, now the Trustmark Bank. The new facility featured things like air conditioning, an automatic door and elevated sitting booths. Fresh baked products were placed near the cash register for customers to purchase. The cafe also provided people with the opportunity to watch the food being prepared from an open kitchen concept. Many of these innovative ideas were a first for Jackson. All signs of Pop being a visionary.

The vision continued with new Primos Cafe' and Bake Shops springing up throughout the Jackson area from 1948 to 1955. Mildred's and Pop's four boys returned from serving in WWII or from college during those years. They opened new stores throughout the Jackson area for their sons to own and operate. Restaurant number two opened at 1016 North State Street (across from the Baptist Hospital). Pop took on a new challenge: he built a two-story building for the third restaurant further south on State Street. There was the purchase of Burton's restaurant on West Capitol, which made number four. However, it was sold when Primos Northgate opened its doors in 1964.

The Primos Northgate was very different from the other Cafes. This was a 43,000 square foot area which offered banquet rooms as well as a beautiful center court. This restaurant was a place for all types of family gatherings, a venue for businesses and organizations until 2001.

The other restaurants eventually closed as the interests of the four sons changed. Kenneth Angelo Primos, known as "Pappy," remained the longest with the operations. Now, ninety-four years of age, Pappy delighted family and customers when he was able to attend the business's birthday celebrations.

### **Business Today**

Out of the sixteen grandchildren Pop and Mildred had, it was Kenneth Angelo Primos' son Don, along with his wife Virginia, who came to work in the family business in 1977. Don had just graduated with a business degree from Mississippi State and was ready to put what he had learned into the day-to-day operations. And he did, but with any business, it also took on-the-job training. It seems the call to be a visionary was in the genes.

Over the years, Don learned every aspect of the business, including washing dishes, baking cakes, interacting with customers and building relationships, as well as the decision-making and everything else that it takes to accomplish daily operations. He wears the hat of CEO, but he is a servant-leader. Mary Claire Primos, fourth generation, works beside her father and is the marketing director.

Challenges are a part of any business, and Don shares his top three: finding management and teaching them his vision for operations, making the decision to open multiple stores and developing recipes. His greatest joys are the decision to be closed on Sunday, having

his daughter work for him and the friendships that have developed with his staff.

Currently, there are three Primos Cafe' and Bake Shop locations: 2323 Lakeland Drive in Flowood; 515 Lake Harbour Drive in Ridgeland; and a now a 6600 square-foot restaurant located at 201 Baptist Drive in Madison.

### A Tidbit about Blue Plate Specials

Did you know the phrase, "Blue Plate Special" originated in the late 1920s and remained popular through the 1950s? It was a phrase used in diners and cafes throughout the United States and Canada. This might have been the first thing the waiter or waitress told you as he or she placed a menu in your hand. It might have been advertised on a poster in the window or on a blackboard near the entrance; regular customers knew what the inexpensive meal was for each day of the week and could plan their week accordingly.

Today, when you enter one of the three Primos Cafe' & Bake Shop locations or order online, you will find the 90-year old tradition continued. Pop would be pleased to see the diversity of the menu to meet the taste buds of today's customer. Additionally, awards and honorable mentions have been given for the "Best Blue Plate" from consumers casting their vote through the annual The Best of Mississippi or Best of Jackson.

### The Bake Shop

Pop's original recipe for his famous gingerbread men cookies is still in use today. The mold Pop used is a symbol and a reminder to the Primos family of the foundation upon which this business was built. The gingerbread men cookies are still one of the most requested items from the bakery, along with the fudge squares.

Don and Virginia personally began making cakes in the early 1980s to sell from the Bake Shop, and they sold well. Now there is a full-time baker at the Flowood location who oversees the operation and provides everything for the other two sites, and for the online shipping orders.

Many people want to keep the Southern holiday tradition of giving freshly-baked cakes, cookies, pies, gingerbread men and cheese straws, making the months of November and December the busiest time of year at the Bake Shop.

This past April, as part of the birthday celebration festivities, customers were offered an opportunity to be a part of the Bakery Tour. Approximately fifty-five people responded to the invitation. They had a wonderful time decorating the gingerbread men and seeing how the cheese straws were made.

### A Bright Future

Don Primos shares, "PRIMOS is more than a restaurant; it is an institution, one that has been a part of the lives of many generations of Mississippians, carrying with it the value of quality and delicious food, friendly atmosphere and dedicated service. This is our legacy." ◉

*Happy 90th Birthday Primos!*

