

'Jiffy' mix is Michigan success story

Fretting about gasoline prices and the rising cost of everything else one morning last week, I was overtaken by pangs of hunger.

That sparked some curiosity, and sure enough, within minutes several Internet sources had confirmed that stress can, indeed, induce the urge to eat.

But you probably knew that already.

What happened next was a visit to the pantry in search of a goody. And what did I find? Well, I must say it was a great stress reliever, packaged in a small, blue, white and red box, labeled "JIFFY" corn muffin mix."

Within the hour I had a batch of hot corn bread – johnnycake, we used to call it – on the table to very nicely quell the hunger pangs.

But the real stress reliever was that little package.

And more particularly, it was the price label: "36 cents." Toss in the required egg and a third of a cup of milk, and my whole eight-inch diameter johnnycake had cost less than a little regular from Mickey D's. Of course, I haven't added in the value of my own labor here. Is that fudging things a little?

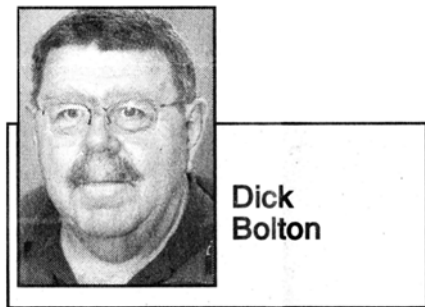
Anyway, my johnnycake tasted better and was a lot more satisfying than fare from a fast food place, too.

All that got me to thinking.

You know, I remember seeing the "Jiffy" brand corn muffin mix as long as I've shopped for groceries in Michigan. It always has seemed like a rare bargain, too. In the back of my mind, there was the sense it was some kind of a local – or at least regional – product.

Well, last week's study of that little box informed me that "Jiffy" mix is a product of the Chelsea Milling Company of Chelsea, Mich., down by Ann Arbor. Regional inkling confirmed.

And that, of course, inspired yet another visit to the Internet.



Sure enough, the Chelsea Milling Company has its very own Web site.

Turns out, the company claims to have been around as a family business in Chelsea for 120 years.

It also produces 20 other cake, piecrust dough, pizza dough, muffin, pancake, biscuit and frosting mixes, in addition to the corn muffin offering. All are offered up at very reasonable prices. And it's not just a regional outfit. Chelsea Milling's "Jiffy" products are sold in all 50 of the United States, and make it to some foreign countries through the U.S. military.

According to the company Web site, "Chelsea Milling Company is a complete manufacturer. We store wheat. We mill wheat into flour. We use that flour for our own mixes. We make our own 'little blue' boxes. We do it all..." right there in Chelsea.

But I especially like the next part of that spiel, which says, "...that's why our mixes provide you with the best possible value. Value is using the highest quality ingredients and the best price!"

If personal experience with the "Jiffy" mixes is any indicator, I've seldom read words in a company's own description of itself and its products that ring more true than the latter. The price certainly is low, and the products are good.

The company boasts quite openly about that "best price" business on a Web page showing how relatively little is spent on marketing the "Jiffy" products. A straightforward graphic shows that while all producers bear the cost of

ingredients, labor and packaging, the "Jiffy" brand foregoes costly advertising, merchandising, and coupon offers, which Chelsea Milling labels, "extra costs to you."

Instead, the company relies on brand recognition by loyal customers who have come to appreciate its quality-price-value equation. Word of mouth certainly helps.

The internet seems to give "Jiffy" products a boost, too. Running a search using key words "Jiffy corn muffin mix" produced "about 33,400" hits as reported by Google.

Other "Jiffy" not-so-trivial lore I discovered is that Chelsea Milling lays claims to having been first to manufacture and market a baking mix of any kind, starting in 1930. Credit for originating the product is given to Mabel White Holmes, whose husband, Howard, once upon a time ran the family-owned business.

Mabel must have been quite a feisty and formidable lady. "Jiffy" mix lore has it that she was fond of saying, "It's so easy even a man could do it." We guess she was referring to baking with her concoction.

But it must be noted also that after her husband died in a 1936 mill accident, Mabel stepped in as company president for a few years. Her sons took over the operation in 1940. Today, her grandson, Howard "Howdy" Holmes runs the show.

Back to personal experience, I'd say using the "Jiffy" mixes definitely is easy enough for this man to do it. I just follow the directions.

The results are yummy, and a good stress relieving bargain all around.

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