

## Ford Gum 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013

In 1913, a 20-year-old roofing salesman named Ford S. Mason first became aware of the gumball vending business that would eventually be known as Ford Gum & Machine Company.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the gumball vending industry was in its infancy, and had a terrible reputation, both for the unreliability of the machines and the bad taste of the gumballs. Still, Mason, who had been searching for a way to supplement his income during the winter months when roofing wasn't viable, was intrigued when he met a man who told him all about the business.

Mason saw opportunity. He borrowed money to lease 102 machines and placed them in stores and shops in western New York state communities. For the next few winters, Mason collected the gumball pennies and restocked machines. It took only a few winters for him to see its potential; he quit the roofing business to make gumballs his full-time profession.

Mason figured that if he could give customers their money's worth, which meant better-tasting gum and reliable vending machines, it would be a success. Mason's father, W.N. Mason, a Baptist minister, advised his son to make his own vending machines and "share your profits with God." Ford S. Mason did just that. His father, an inventor by avocation, created a better vending machine design that used one spring and a thick coil resistant to rust. This newly patented



Founder Ford Mason (lower right) with some of his employees

machine was introduced by Ford Mason in 1917 and he named his company the Ford Vending Machine Company, which had its headquarters in an old church.

It was Ford's new machine that helped him create a business empire stretching from coast to coast, with eventually more than 500,000 Ford-manufactured one-cent gumball vending machines on store counters and on pedestals in countless North American communities.

To service the Ford Gum machines, Mason set up a nationwide system of operators. In 1927, the company appointed its first distributor, Norris Rowbotham from Walworth, Wisconsin. It became a family business, with Norris' son, Norland, eventually taking over his father's business, which serviced more than 2,500 Ford Gum machines in 14 Wisconsin counties. When Norland retired from the business his son, David, took over, becoming the third generation of Rowbothams to be a Ford distributor. David Rowbotham continues to service the southern Wisconsin area to this day.

In 1934, Ford Mason changed the name of his company to Ford Gum & Machine Company, making its headquarters in Lockport, New York, where the company engaged in research and development, assembly of the gumball machines and the manufacture of gumballs.

As his company grew, Mason quietly donated funds to his church (and others), but in 1939, he took a step that would identify his company as a charitable one. That year, in Columbus, Ohio, a ladies club was raising money for a children's hospital and they approached a Ford gum distributor for a donation. Ford Mason learned of this and donated 20 percent of that community's gumball profits to the hospital.

This fundraising arrangement

