Sibling rivalry. It’s a rite of passage for many adults, filled with tumultuous pranks and endless teasing between brothers and sisters. While many would find it daunting to work with their family members, for me, choosing to run and operate a family-owned business, and to work side-by-side with my family each day, has been one of the best and most rewarding decisions I’ve ever made.

Our story began 75 years ago in 1939, when my grandfather, Henry Blommer, had a vision— which he had the courage to pursue—to be a leader in the chocolate industry. With the commitment and support of his brothers, Bern and Al, he launched Blommer Chocolate Company, now North America’s largest cocoa processor and ingredient chocolate manufacturer. Henry was originally a partner in Ambrosia Chocolate in Milwaukee until he and his two brothers decided to start their own business.

Since then, the Blommer family has grown the business from 30 employees to more than 800. Today, Blommer is the third-largest ingredient chocolate manufacturer in the world with four North American factories in Illinois, California, Pennsylvania and Canada, as well as a sales and technical center in China. Blommer processes a broad array of chocolate and chocolate ingredients, including value-added products such as specialty compounds, specialty cocoa powders and Signature Line chocolate.

As we celebrate our 75th anniversary this year, I realize how incredibly lucky and fortunate we have been to experience such tremendous success. This is especially meaningful given that very few family-owned businesses succeed beyond the third or fourth generation. Three generations later—and four generations in the chocolate business—we continue to grow stronger and more successful with each new generation.

Being a family-owned and family-operated business has not only been personally fulfilling, but it has also given us a unique competitive advantage through our strong culture of customer focus and the way we seek to build long-term relationships, not only with our customers, but also with our employees.

I’ve had the privilege to be part of this great company since 1957 when I began working full-time at Blommer. It’s been exciting to watch the company grow and evolve over the years, particularly as my brother, Joe, and I handed the reins over to the next generation of Blommer family members, who have done a tremendous job maintaining the vision and core values that Henry set forth 75 years ago.

Hank Blommer, chairman of the board

IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout our 75-year history, we’ve learned much as a company, especially what it takes to maintain and grow a family legacy. We’ve had our challenges along the way, even coming close to losing our business just over two decades ago, when several relatives sold their shares in the company to one of our largest competitors after Henry’s death in 1992.

However, this was an opportunity that actually strengthened our resolve. Within 18 months, we were able to buy back our company shares.

This period was a crucial turning point for us as a family, particularly for myself and other third-generation members who were just entering the family busi-