Mount Olive Pickle Company, Inc. was formally organized on January 1, 1926. Few companies can boast a 90-year history, but for the 13 shareholders present in S.L. Warren’s office that January day, the meeting was to launch something of great economic and civic value. They founded the pickle company to create a market for local farmers, believing its success would benefit the local economy. Little could those original shareholders envision the fruits of their endeavor 90 years later. Mt. Olive Pickles today carries the name of its hometown in all 50 states, and in 2016 Mt. Olive is the leading selling brand of pickles, peppers and relishes in US grocery stores.

Even as it has worked to achieve its position as the leading national brand, it has remained true to its original proposition. For nine decades Mt. Olive Pickles has served as a mainstay in the economic well-being of its community. It has done so by focusing on the ultimate goals that are closest to home: to produce an excellent product, to provide a fair return for its shareholders, to be a progressive, compassionate employer, and to remain a valued corporate citizen in the community.

90 YEARS A PROUD MILESTONE
The early 1900s found the small agricultural town of Mount Olive, North Carolina humming as a small commercial center for the surrounding rural farm community. On Saturdays, throngs of farm families strolled along Center Street for their weekly shopping. The Wilmington Weldon Railroad was the community’s lifeline to the outside world. At least four trains came through town each day, transporting mail, passengers and freight—including carloads of fresh local produce to be sold in northern markets. When bumper crops of cucumbers saturated the market, many fields frequently went to waste. That prompted entrepreneur Shikrey Baddour of Goldsboro to enlist George Moore of Castle Hayne to help him dispose of their excess cucumbers. Exacting the help of George Moore and E. I. Withers, Mr. Baddour buys the cucumbers and brines them with the idea of selling them to other pickle companies. When not enough buyers are found, plans begin for a packing operation in Mount Olive.

The company is incorporated on February 25 with 21 individuals who agree to purchase $15,000 in capital stock. By year’s end, Mt. Olive has 37 shareholders and $19,500 in capital, and it packs 6,250 cases, most under the brand name Carolina Beauty. Board President I. F. Withers is hired to manage the company as secretary-treasurer. D. K. Kornegay takes his place as president. Total sales for the year are $50,944 and the cash balance on hand as of April 1 is $1,317.

January 2, 1926, Mount Olive Pickle Company, Inc., is formally organized. H. M. Cox, Sr., is named president. George Moore becomes the factory superintendent, and Shikrey Baddour is hired to head sales.

A Lebanese immigrant from nearby Goldsboro, Shikrey Baddour, decides to help local farmers dispose of their excess cucumbers. Exacting the help of George Moore and E. I. Withers, Mr. Baddour buys the cucumbers and brines them with the idea of selling them to other pickle companies. When not enough buyers are found, plans begin for a packing operation in Mount Olive.

In the beginning, cucumbers were taken from the vats to nearby tables, where old coffee pots were used to pour syrup into jars.
The business people—a collection of merchants, physicians, produce brokers, banking and insurance executives—established the company in 1926, offering shares of stock to Mr. Baddour and Mr. Moore in exchange for their original investment. The first board of directors named H.M. Cox, Sr. as president and hired Mr. Moore as the plant manager and Mr. Baddour as the salesman. In 1929 the board hired board President I.F. Witherington as secretary-treasurer. In that role, Mr. Witherington ran the company until his death in 1955. For most of that time, he did so from his insurance office downtown.

The directors could regularly be found in the factory doing menial tasks for which they couldn’t yet afford a labor force. Teddy Cox Murray, daughter of Mr. Cox, remembered her father getting up after supper and announcing that he had to join the other directors back over at the pickle plant to glue labels on jars.

The shareholders roll up their sleeves and go to work

THE SOUTHERLAND FAMILY

If working at Mt. Olive has a family feel, perhaps it’s because so many families work here, and have for decades. Take the Southerland women, who have all worked in Packing. Daisy Southerland was here from 1949 to 1972. Her daughter Inez would eventually become the first African-American Packing Department supervisor, retiring in 1985. Inez’s daughter Mary Joyce retired in 2001 after 17 years of service, and Mary Joyce’s daughter Wynona has been here since 1998. They represent the generations of families whose strong work ethic have helped make Mt. Olive a great company and brand.

THE SHAREHOLDERS ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES AND GO TO WORK

The company invests $5,799 in a new profit-sharing program for its employees, making Mt. Olive Pickle one of the first 200 companies in the U.S. to do so.

Mt. Olive Pickle lengthens its “green season,” increasing production of fresh pack items due to the development of new cucumber acreage. This strategic accomplishment is credited to R. Butler, field manager for the company.

Breaking the half-million dollar mark, net sales increase 50 percent from the year prior, to a total of $706,875.

Dr. C.C. Henderson is named president.

Mt. Olive Pickle logo, designed by Owens-Illinois Glass Company, debuts on all company brands at the time. These included Carolina Beauty, May Pack, Little Sister, Little Rebel, Pick of Carolina and MOPICO, among others. This new script logo is the predecessor of the Mt. Olive flag logo introduced in 1967, which is still in use today.

Mt. Olive Pickle launches its “green season,” increasing production of fresh pack items due to the development of new cucumber acreage. This strategic accomplishment is credited to R. Butler, field manager for the company.

I.F. Witherington, who had led Mt. Olive as secretary-treasurer since 1928, passes away after complications from surgery. John Neal Walker, hired by Mr. Witherington in 1950, is tapped by the board of directors to lead the company.

Committed to the Mount Olive community since its modest beginnings, Mt. Olive Pickle launches its Employees Community Fund to help fund charities and other non-profit organizations in the area. The program starts with approximately $1,000 and is governed by an employee committee.

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Over time, Mt. Olive Pickle earned a reputation for its commitment to its people. When it implemented a profit-sharing plan for its employees in 1943, it was one of the first in the country to do so. In the late 1960s, the company launched a tuition reimbursement program for employees who wanted to further their education. Today, a company-wide wellness program and an aggressive safety initiative—Carolina STAR—firmly establish a culture of employee health and safety at Mt. Olive Pickle.

With its beginnings as a true “community stock proposition,” as Mr. Witherington described it in 1930, Mt. Olive Pickle stayed true to its roots. During the economic recession of the mid-1970s, the Town of Mount Olive found itself in a cash crunch. To help, the company—the largest taxpayer in town—volunteered to pay its taxes early. “The town was in a bind,” said John N. Walker, who led the company from 1955 to 1990. The company’s support of community endeavors goes back decades. In operation since 1959, the Employees Community Fund in 2016 alone distributed $133,575 to 48 area nonprofit community organizations. In all, Mt. Olive Pickle provides more than $750,000 in financial and product contributions annually. Beneficiaries include organizations from the University of Mount Olive to youth recreation leagues and volunteer fire departments, United Way of Wayne County and Habitat for Humanity of Goldsboro-Wayne.

The National Pickle Packers Association names John N. Walker as its president.

Green sales break the $5 million mark. Under a reorganization of the board of directors, S. L. Warren is named chairman of the board, and John N. Walker becomes president.

The 4,000-year-old secret of how fermentation works supplies control fermentation studies at Mt. Olive Pickle. The research is led by Jack Eshleman of the USDAARS Food Fermentation Lab and John Hontz of Mt. Olive Pickle. The results in 1973 improved fermentation methods used throughout the pickle industry.

L.F. Witherington, when he discovered a double payment on an invoice, to a young John N. Walker: “The company is doing all right and all, but not well enough to pay invoices twice.”

Mr. Olive is the first food processor in the United States to use high fructose corn syrup in the preparation of its products.

Efficiency and productivity escalate following the installation of the first computerized production equipment. Over the next two decades, all production equipment in the plant is upgraded and automated.

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A PASSIONATE COMMITMENT TO ITS PICKLE PEOPLE

TRUE TO ITS ROOTS

$750,000
A Bold Branding Move Proves Rewarding

Like most regional pickle companies of the day, Mt. Olive packed a variety of brands, and by the 1950s Mt. Olive’s most popular brand was Carolina Beauty. Under the guidance of John N. Walker, the company began the gradual consolidation of all of its products under the single Mt. Olive brand, one of the first pickle companies to do so. The Mt. Olive script logo first appeared in 1953, and by 1967 the company introduced the familiar logo that continues to grace our labels. This single, distinctive, identifiable brand proved easier to promote with customers and consumers alike. It also laid the foundation for the company’s launch as a national brand decades later.

1989
John N. Walker retires as president and chairman of the board of president emeritus. Bill Bryan, who joined Mt. Olive Pickle in 1981, is named company president.

1990
Bill Bryan is elected President of Pickle Packers International.

For his significant contributions to the pickle industry, John N. Walker is awarded the Silver Shadow Award by Pickle Packers International.

The Corner of Cucumber & Vine becomes official when the Town Board of Mount Olive rename the portion of Witherington and North Center Streets within the company property. Monthly production now exceeds one million cases for the first time ever.

The first English-Spanish interpreter is hired to support a growing influx of Hispanic employees. By 2006, Hispanic employees made up approximately 20 percent of the company’s workforce.

Serving yet another avenue for charitable giving by the company, the board of directors creates the Mt. Olive Pickle Company Foundation.

When Ruth Parker and her sisters were little girls, her parents bought a share of Mt. Olive Pickle stock for each of them. W.P. and Lilly Martin used the dividend checks to teach their daughters tithing and saving. Today, Ruth’s daughter Margaret Ann Parvin sits on the board of directors and continues her grandfather’s downtown business, W.P. Martin Store. While many shareholders today are three and four generations removed from the founders and may or may not have physical ties to Mount Olive, a deep sense of pride in the company’s success remains. “We’re fortunate because we have a group of shareholders that understands the heritage of the company, and they believe in it,” said Bill Bryan, executive chairman.

Gross sales break the $25 million mark.

Mt. Olive moves to full-service leasing.

John N. Walker retires as president and chairman of the board of president emeritus. Bill Bryan, who joined Mt. Olive Pickle in 1981, is named company president.

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As a way to celebrate the company’s 115-year anniversary, the board of directors created the Mt. Olive Pickle Company Foundation. Bill Bryan is elected President of Pickle Packers International.

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Growth through the 1990s became crucial to the company’s survival as the climate of corporate consolidations and mergers impacted virtually every American business segment. This was evident in the pickle industry as many of the country’s smaller pickle companies simply began to disappear. While one of the best-selling brands of pickles in the Southeast, Mt. Olive was still only a regional pickle company with distribution in just a handful of states.

“We decided that if we wanted to remain independent, we had to grow larger,” said Bill Bryan, who took the helm as president in 1990. What followed was an aggressive strategy to expand Mt. Olive’s distribution and sales. Led by Executive Vice President Bobby Frye, Mt. Olive’s sales team successfully extended Mt. Olive’s reach to national proportions. Today, new markets, innovative products and packaging, and superior customer service remain the key elements in the company’s continued growth.

When anyone asked longtime Maintenance Superintendent Ray Joyner how things were going in the plant that day, his reply was always, “What have you heard?”

“Our drivers have represented us well on the public highways and at our customers’ warehouses,” President Bill Bryan said at the time. “They have carried themselves, and our company name, with good humor, dependability, and a strong sense of pride. Today, Mt. Olive’s products are picked up from our distribution center and delivered by our customers, or by third-party carriers. Our fleet of local trucks continues to carry bright, colorful Mt. Olive graphics — rolling billboards still.”

2001
Drew Moore is named chairman of the board.

2003
The Careksa STAR Award, the highest honor bestowed by the NC Department of Labor for effective health and safety management, was awarded to Mt. Olive Pickle and its employees.

2004
Mt. Olive purchases a five-cucumber-picking machine to launch a mechanical harvest program in North Carolina. It receives its first mechanically harvested cucumbers later that summer.

2007
Mt. Olive purchases five cucumber-harvesting machines in April to launch a mechanical harvest program in North Carolina. It receives its first mechanically harvested cucumbers later that summer.

2008
The year marks the end of a five-year consumer boycott of Mt. Olive by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), a Toledo, OH labor union, which called the boycott in 1999 in an effort to organize migrant farm workers in North Carolina.

The Employee Community Fund awards its first employee scholarships to Blake Waters, Valeria Stevens, and Tara Mobley.

Drew Moore is named chairman of the board.

Ed Borden is named chairman of the board.

The Carolina STAR Award, the highest honor awarded by the NC Department of Labor for effective health and safety management, is awarded to Mt. Olive Pickle and its employees.

The company introduces tamper-evident banding on its products.

Mt. Olive products are now distributed in 45 states, including California and Hawaii.

The NC Pickle Festival, organized by the Mount Olive Area Chamber of Commerce, celebrates its 20th year.

The Employee Community Fund awards its first employee scholarships to Blake Waters, Valeria Stevens, and Tara Mobley.

David Weil is named chairman of the board.

Mt. Olive debuts on the national Food Network show “Unwrapped.”

Mt. Olive purchases five cucumber-harvesting machines in April to launch a mechanical harvest program in North Carolina. It receives its first mechanically harvested cucumbers later that summer.

Ed Borden is named chairman of the board.

Mt. Olive’s tradition of over-the-road trucks started in 1939, when Harry Kraft purchased the first delivery truck. While the black-and-white photo did not disclose it, the truck was actually red in color. Over the years Mt. Olive’s distinctive, sassy-grass-green trucks – and their drivers – continued to advertise the company on our highways up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

But by late 2008, the company had determined that the decline of backhaul opportunities for glass meant that the 10-driver fleet was no longer economically feasible to continue. The fleet was officially disbanded on February 27, 2009.
IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Over the years, Mt. Olive’s products could be spotted in movies and television shows. “Click,” an Adam Sandler comedy, comes to mind, and fans of TV’s real-life show “Jersey Shore” watched as Snookie regularly purchased, and ate, her favorite Mt. Olive Killer Dills. Mt. Olive made its official national TV debut in November 2007 on the legendary television game show “The Price is Right.” (The contestant who won the game that included our picklePAKs would go on to win the car.) The Food Network came calling shortly after, and production of our Bread & Butter Chips was featured in an episode of “Unwrapped” in 2008. Mt. Olive and its products would go on to be featured in three more “Unwrapped” episodes in 2009 and 2010, as well as on another Food Network show one.

Controlled for exhaustion studies, soy by N.C. State researchers in the USDA ARS Food Fermentation Lab and conducted on Mr. Olive in the late 1960s, improved fermentation methods throughout the industry. In 1975, the company was the first food manufacturer to use high fructose corn syrup instead of sugar. Years later it became the first pickle brand to produce pickle products sweetened with the no calorie sweetener SPLENDA®, and the first to feature pickles in single serve cups. More recently, Mt. Olive has been using cage-free chickens as a food preservation agent rather than salt, which has been used as a food preservative for centuries. Once again working with the ARS Food Fermentation Lab, in 2011 Mt. Olive began to carefully ferment pickles with calcium chloride. By 2016 the company was producing hundreds of thousands of cases of calcium chloride product. Already used by Mt. Olive as a firming agent, calcium chloride is more environmentally friendly than salt, as its waste can be used as a soil enhancer. And, its use enables Mt. Olive to cut the amount of salt discharged into its treated wastewater.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Selling Mt. Olive pickles has been a Frye family affair for over eight decades. Birdie Frye Robinson, or “Mrs. Birdie,” came to work for Mt. Olive in 1933, leading the company’s southern sales until her retirement in 1976. Her son Bob would become national sales manager and is still with the company after 63 years. Her grandson Bobby came to Mt. Olive sales in 1981 and was executive vice president before he was tapped as president and CEO in 2015. Bobby’s son Robbie is currently on the sales team in Gastonia. The company “has been good to me and to the Frye family,” said Bob, “and we hope the foundation laid down by Mrs. Birdie will remain in place for decades to come.”

AN UNWAVERING INNOVATIVE SPIRIT

In keeping with this focus on innovation, the company consistently upgraded its equipment and facilities, embracing new technologies to keep pace with customer demands. Such improvements not only enhanced the company’s ability to remain competitive, but set the stage for improved efficiency and productivity.

2011

President Bill Bryan is recognized by the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) with its Center for the Public Trust’s Being a Difference Award.

2010

Mt. Olive’s over-the-road truck fleet is retired.

Ollie Q. Cumber replaces Mr. Crisp as the official company mascot.

Mt. Olive is certified as a Safe Quality Food (SQF) facility. SQF is designed to bring consistency to third-party audit standards, and to enhance food safety and quality.

Malcolm T. Murray, Jr. is named chairman of the board.

2013

After 40 years of its two-toned paper labels, Mt. Olive rolls out pressure sensitive labels sporting a fresh, sophisticated new look.

President Bill Bryan is elected president of Pickle Packers International, his second term.

Mt. Olive mourns the passing of John N. Neal Walker, president emeritus of the company.

2009

Mt. Olive now has distribution in all 50 states with its entry into Safeway and Albertsons stores in Washington and Oregon.

Phil Denlinger, Mt. Olive’s ag procurement manager is named President of Pickle Packers International.

2012

Mt. Olive now has distribution in all 50 states with its entry into Safeway and Albertsons stores in Washington and Oregon.

Mt. Olive introduces the Johnny N. Reed Walker, president emeritus of the company.

2013

Phil Denlinger, Mt. Olive’s ag procurement manager is named President of Pickle Packers International.

2011

The Distribution Center adds another 138,000 square feet, doubling the size and capacity for an additional 1.6 million cases.

Wellness for Life, an employee wellness program that rewards employees for healthy behaviors, is launched.

Mt. Olive adds items made with Sea Salt to the product line.

2011

The Edward B. Bryan Center adds another 108,000 square foot, doubling the size and capacity for an additional 1.6 million cases.

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A number of projects, in planning throughout 2013 and continuing into 2014, significantly changed the layout of the production areas. The Line 6 relish line was expanded and stretched into the finished goods department to make room for an additional pasteurizer for Line 1, the hand line. A 3,600 square foot onsite glass warehouse is under construction. Construction also begins on a 77,000 square foot addition to the distribution center, this time to make room for two new production lines.

In 2014, Mt. Olive featured in a National Geographic video news article regarding its groundbreaking use of calcium chloride as a fermentation agent. For the first time since 1990, Mt. Olive announces a change at the helm. President Bill Bryan is named executive chairman of the board, and Executive Vice President Bobby Frye becomes the new president and CEO. Chairman Faison Hester is named vice chairman and lead director.

For the first time since 1995, Mt. Olive announced in a May 26, 2014, article that the board had named executive chairman of the board, and Executive Vice President Bobby Frye becomes the new president and CEO. Chairman Faison Hester is named vice chairman and lead director.

One of the company’s goals in transitioning to a larger role is to help manage the growth and increasingly complex operations. Mt. Olive reorganized its leadership team in 2015, with President Bill Bryan named executive chairman, and Chairman Faison Hester named vice chairman and lead director. Executive Vice President Bobby Frye was named president and CEO — the first change in leadership in 25 years. Mr. Frye, with 34 years’ experience with Mt. Olive, had led the company’s sales and marketing over the last two decades.

Other senior management additions occurred in 2015 and 2016 to provide greater oversight and accountability in the areas of technical services, human resources and ag procurement.

MANAGING THE TRANSITION TO A LARGER ROLE

The Simply Pickles line, featuring fewer, select ingredients, is launched. These non-GMO products with distinctive labeling use sea salt, sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, and turmeric in place of FD&C dyes.

By the end of the 2016 fiscal year in April, Mt. Olive had produced a record 150 million jars, or 15.4 million cases. Mt. Olive purchased the former SATA NC and Farha Spring facilities for warehouse and storage, bringing its holdings to 150 acres and 1.1 million square feet of warehouse and production space. The Simply Pickles line featuring fewer, select ingredients, is launched. Three non-GMO products with distinctive labeling use sea salt, sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, and turmeric in place of FD&C dyes. The Simply Pickles line featuring fewer, select ingredients, is launched. Three non-GMO products with distinctive labeling use sea salt, sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, and turmeric in place of FD&C dyes. The Simply Pickles line featuring fewer, select ingredients, is launched. Three non-GMO products with distinctive labeling use sea salt, sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, and turmeric in place of FD&C dyes. The Simply Pickles line featuring fewer, select ingredients, is launched. Three non-GMO products with distinctive labeling use sea salt, sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, and turmeric in place of FD&C dyes.
In its 100th year, Mt. Olive Pickles stands in a virtual tie with its primary competitor as the number one brand of pickles, peppers and relishes across all US outlets. It broke production records with 15 million square feet of manufacturing and warehouse space across 150 acres. The possibilities for continued growth through innovation, new markets, private label, and higher penetration in existing markets all seem limitless. Mt. Olive’s brand of pickles, peppers and relishes are found in every state of the country, with the exception of Hawaii. The company has 7,123 shareholders, 110 employees and 400,000 customers. It’s a great place to work, with the community and shareholders at its core. Mt. Olive’s core values remain the same.

"We want to give our shareholders a fair return on their investment while being a great place to work," said Bobby Frye, president and COO. "We want to keep our current innovation and potential customers alive. We want to be good stewards of the community where we live and the environment where we operate. All of these things will continue to drive what we do and into the future, just as they have for the last 90 years."