

[From the Lexington Herald-Leader, July 12, 2011]

KENNY BAKER

(By JenniF Hewlett)

When Kenny Baker played the fiddle, the notes flowed out like honey pours from a jar—smooth, thick and wide, according to his friends.

"All your great fiddle players in Nashville, when they heard Kenny, they knew there was a lot more to be had with a fiddle, a lot more to learn," said Ronnie Eldridge, a close friend.

"He was the best at hoedowns. Nobody could touch him on the waltz. He was a singer's dream," Eldridge said.

Mr. Baker, 85, a Letcher County native who spent many years performing with legendary bluegrass musician Bill Monroe, penned 92 instrumentals and tutored many others in his "long bow" fiddling style, died Friday, just a few days after his last jam session. Mr. Baker, who lived near Gallatin, Tenn., died of complications from a stroke.

Mr. Baker first picked up a fiddle when he was 5, according to his son, Kenneth Baker Jr. of Columbus, Ohio. Mr. Baker's father had been an old-time fiddle player.

Mr. Baker later turned to the guitar, but he eventually went back to the fiddle. He grew up inspired by jazz, his son said.

After joining the Navy during World War II, Mr. Baker was soon transferred off a destroyer escort ship to entertain troops in the South Pacific. After military service, he returned home to Letcher County, got married, worked in coal mines and played at barn dances on weekends.

He started playing the fiddle professionally with country musician Don Gibson. In 1953, Mr. Baker went from playing Western swing and dance-band tunes to bluegrass music, performing with Monroe, who is known as the father of bluegrass music, beginning in 1957. After a few years, he went back to the coal mines in eastern Kentucky. He returned to Monroe's Blue Grass Boys band in 1968 and left again in 1984, but he was reunited with the band in 1994 at Monroe's Bean Blossom bluegrass festival.

Monroe's well-known "Uncle Pen" album features Mr. Baker on the fiddle.

"He was just absolutely the backbone of that band," Eldridge said.

"They were at the White House one time. Bill Monroe's group was invited by Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter," Kenneth Baker Jr. said. "He liked to say when Rosalynn had a request, she came to Dad."

Many people went to bluegrass music festivals to hear Kenny Baker play the fiddle as much as they went to hear Bill Monroe sing, bluegrass music great Bobby Osborne said.

Many great fiddlers, past and present, are indebted to Baker, said Osborne, who performed with Mr. Baker and shared a dressing room with him at the Grand Ole Opry.

"I couldn't single him out as the top player of all time, but a lot of people would," Osborne said.

Mr. Baker's son said technique and a great memory made his father stand out.

"Dad would use the bow from tip to tip. That made his fiddling so smooth, and that was something different in the bluegrass world," Kenneth Baker Jr. said. "It was all by ear, and he had a tremendous ability to recall just about any song that people asked for—hundreds of songs."

Mr. Baker was particularly proud of the songs he wrote and recorded, his son said.

"At any of the major fiddle contests, probably a third of the tunes played will be Bill Baker tunes," Eldridge said.

Said Osborne: "The tunes that he wrote, they were so down to earth. The melodies that he put to his tunes were so easy to learn."

After 1984, Mr. Baker performed in many shows with dobro great Josh Graves.

In 1993, Mr. Baker received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1999, he was named to the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Honor in Owensboro.

In addition to his son, Mr. Baker is survived by his wife, Audrey Baker; another son, Johnny Lee Baker of Nashville; two sisters; a brother; four grandchildren; and several great- and great-great-grandchildren.

Services will be at 2 p.m. Tuesday at Burdine Freewill Baptist Church in Letcher County. Carty Funeral Homes in Jenkins is handling arrangements.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Madam President, I rise to join my fellow Coloradans, my colleagues in the U.S. Congress and others across the Nation to celebrate Black History Month. I am honored to recognize the contributions of the African-American community in the United States and especially in my home State of Colorado.

I am particularly proud to reflect on the legacy of community involvement exemplified by Colorado's Black community, from Colorado's earliest days as a western territory to the present. There have been many community leaders, public officials, and entrepreneurs who have contributed immensely over the years to make our great State what it is today, from our historic and cultural institutions, to the farms and small businesses of our rural communities.

One gentleman named James Beckwourth, whom I have recognized in previous years as a true frontiersman, exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit that led to the building of the economic foundations that supported the formation of our great State. He led expeditions into Colorado's Rocky Mountains in the 1820s and returned in the 1830s to serve at Fort Vasquez near Denver. In the 1840s, he co-founded a trading post and settlement named Fort Pueblo to serve as a trading hub for the Native Americans, Mexican settlers and other American frontiersmen along the Santa Fe Trail. This settlement eventually became the City of Pueblo and still serves as a commercial hub for Southeast Colorado.

Mr. Beckwourth exemplifies the entrepreneurship that continues to thrive in all of Colorado's African-American communities. Today, I would like to specifically recognize the importance of the continuation of the entrepreneurial spirit in Black communities throughout Colorado and share how much it has strengthened Colorado's economy and will continue to help lead our country on the path to economic recovery.

The increase in the number of minority-owned businesses has been a bright spot in our economy. According to the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), operated by the Department of Commerce, minority-owned businesses contributed \$1 trillion to the economy last year and created 5.8

million jobs. Specifically, the total number of African-American owned businesses grew to 1.9 million firms between 2002 and 2007, an increase of 61 percent. This figure is particularly impressive when compared to the employment growth in the rest of the country during that same time period, which was less than 1 percent.

In Colorado, the total number of minority-owned firms increased by 19 percent between 1997 and 2002. By 2007, this figure had increased even further as there were over 59,000 firms, employing over 74,000 workers, and the numbers continue to grow. African-American-owned businesses are an important part of this driving force in our State's economy. Along with all other minority-owned businesses, the increase in African-American owned businesses in Colorado has helped sustain our economy and stimulate job growth. The most recent data show there are more than 9,000 African-American-owned businesses in Colorado. These businesses are especially valued in Colorado because they not only provide jobs to Coloradans, they also provide essential services that meet the needs of both African-American and non-African-American communities. And as we know, successful businesses have a positive economic ripple effect throughout our communities.

In spite of the rising number of minority-owned businesses in Colorado, barriers to success still exist, and in some cases the challenges facing minority-owned businesses can be particularly difficult. This is why I was proud to welcome the creation of the Denver Minority Business Center last summer. The Denver Minority Business Center is an extension of the Minority Business Development Agency, and will further supplement our State's commitment to supporting minority owned businesses by providing the resources to develop technical skills and to access capital and contracting opportunities. Within the last 3 years alone the MBDA has helped create 11,000 new jobs nationally and helped save thousands of existing jobs at minority-owned firms by helping secure \$7 billion in contracts.

As we celebrate the diverse and profound contributions of African-Americans to our State, I hope we will remember to appreciate the positive and sustaining impact of African-American owned businesses, and I hope we will continue to support the creation of new minority owned businesses in all corners of our State. I encourage all Coloradans to join me in reflecting on the invaluable contributions of African Americans to our State and throughout our great Nation—not only during Black History Month, but every month of the year.

Mr. BEGICH. Madam President, I wish to recognize February as Black History Month. Each February our Nation focuses on the contributions African Americans have made in shaping our Nation. This year, the Association

for the Study of African American Life and History has declared the theme for 2012: "Black Women In American Culture and History."

Each year since 1976, the President issues an executive proclamation naming February as African American History Month. More than a half dozen Federal agencies, including the Library of Congress, conduct celebrations, programs, and activities relating to this rich history.

I join them in recognizing the importance of remembering the contributions made by such memorable figures as Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisholm, Sojourner Truth and Maya Angelou just to name a few, and our country's initial African-American First Lady, Michelle Obama.

Just as importantly, countless unsung African-American women have made a mark in their communities by caring for their families, teaching our youth, running successful businesses, serving their churches, and getting elected to public office.

Many African Americans spent their entire lives without getting the credit they deserved. By focusing on Black history in February, we can give overdue acknowledgement and perhaps inspire our young African Americans to continue to achieve greatness.

In Alaska, African Americans have worked to build our communities with their many contributions.

I urge all Alaskans and other Americans to examine and contemplate the significance of the contributions that African-American men and women have made in determining the course of these United States of America.

RECOGNIZING KING ARTHUR FLOUR

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I would like to bring to the Senate's attention the recent accomplishments of King Arthur Flour of Norwich, VT.

Established in 1790, King Arthur Flour has stood the test of time as the oldest flour company in the United States. Over the years King Arthur Flour has continued to raise the bar as an outstanding Vermont company. Most recently the company redesigned its website to allow for easier mobile phone and tablet use, placing it in the Hot 100 feature of Internet Retailer magazine. This continued focus on technology is propelling King Arthur Flour into the future as a cutting-edge company to watch.

As the company has continued to grow and succeed, it has managed to stay true to its Vermont roots. King Arthur Flour has flourished as an employee stock ownership company (ESOP), a model of business stewardship that highlights a strong commitment to the company's workforce and the local community. I also appreciate that King Arthur Flour has been a long-time participant in the annual Taste of Vermont event in Washington, where we bring the finest Vermont products to the Nation's capital.

I wish King Arthur Flour the best of luck as it continues to grow both its web presence with new technology and its physical presence with a major expansion project set to open this summer. I ask unanimous consent that a December 22, 2011, Burlington Free Press article highlighting the company's achievements be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, Dec. 22, 2011]

A (WEB) RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

(By Stephen Mills)

NORWICH.—King Arthur Flour is America's oldest flour company, established 1790, a year into George Washington's presidency.

So how does a company that makes flour and bread—an ancient art—win national awards and acclaim for its business practices in the 21st century?

Quite simply, the company has become the toast of the town among the technocrati of e-commerce.

With the economy flagging, many companies turned to enhanced e-retailing to capture more sales, offering free shipping and additional savings for shopping online. King Arthur Flour is no different, relying heavily on its website, kingarthurfLOUR.com, to sell its products and services that can also be found at its "Norwich, Vermont bakery, school and store"—a sponsorship refrain often heard on Vermont Public Radio, which also calls it "home" for its company-sponsored studio there.

But to maximize online sales, King Arthur Flour redesigned its website to allow its offerings to be displayed on any-size screen, including phone, tablet or desktop. And it did so without having to write exotic or expensive software programs for each device.

Company online services director Halley Silver explains: "Our previous site used a template that was 780 pixels wide. We have moved to a template that adapts its layout from 320 pixels wide to 992 pixels wide. This is called a responsive website design. It's not a mobile application, but rather a mobile-friendly website."

"We have built a new website that works well across mobile devices and tablet computers, as well as desktops and laptops," Silver added. "We have seen strong growth in mobile and tablet traffic to our site, and also realize that having a usable site while shoppers use their phones in the supermarket and tablets in the kitchen is critical to our success online."

The result has been explosive mobile sales growth for the company by shoppers using hand-held smartphones and tablets, up 14 percent in September compared with just 2 percent for the comparable month last year. The sales spike was 5 percent from tablets such as iPads, and 9 percent from mobile phones.

The company's success compares favorably with online sales figures just out for all retailers showing a 15 percent increase over Thanksgiving, the nation's busiest shopping period, compared with last year, and even better than those for mobile devices, which increased 7.4 percent, according to data from IBM Benchmark.

Company CEO Steve Voigt said: "I have long been a big supporter of online efforts and it is very encouraging to see all the success which our customers and we enjoy by our efforts to-date. . . . Baking seems custom-made for the online community; a little online chat, then a little offline baking."

NET ROYALTY

Voigt is demur about the company's financial success, noting figures for the private company are "confidential." But according to the Internet Retailer Top 500 Guide, King Arthur Flour reported online sales of \$15.15 million in 2010. Voigt did say the company has \$96 million in annual revenues for the most recent fiscal year.

Internet Retailer magazine, a leading tracker of e-commerce, picked the company for its Hot 100 feature in the December issue. The Hot 100 are not ranked but represent the nation's the most interesting innovations in online retailing this year.

Under the article heading, "Mobile Drives Design," the publication notes: "Founded in 1790, baking ingredient and bakeware retailer King Arthur Flour is both the oldest brand in this year's Internet Retailer Hot 100 and one of the most forward-looking."

The article added, "King Arthur's 'mobile first' approach to Web design exemplifies an elegant solution to Web merchants' growing challenge of designing for multiple access devices."

Internet Retailer also has asked Silver to be a featured speaker at its annual Internet Retailer Web Design and Usability Conference 2012 in Orlando, Fla., in February. It refers to her as King Arthur's "secret ingredient" who "mixes common sense with tech know-how."

As Silver said she will explain in the session she'll call, "The Mobile-First Approach to Web Multi-Platform Design," one key element in the redesigned site is the use of a Web design language called CSS3 (cascading style sheets) that presents images and product information differently depending on the visitor's device and browser.

"For a small company, King Arthur Flour is a very innovative retailer," magazine editor Don Davis said in a phone interview. Of Silver, he said, "She is someone who is as innovative as anyone at Amazon for the cool stuff they're doing."

"One of the things that's so impressive is that she's extremely knowledgeable about the intricacies of e-commerce and Web technology, an area that's constantly changing, while at the same time has a grasp of her company's business goals," Davis said. "It's not that often you find someone fluent in the language of bits and bytes who also understands the overarching importance of the bottom line."

How does Silver feel about all the attention she's receiving?

"I still am somewhat amazed that a company selling flour and ingredients online can be seen as an inspiration and used as an example to other online retailers," she said.

BUILDING VISIBILITY

Other online innovations Silver has brought to the company include: two website redesigns.

a 55 percent increase in completed checkout sales after adding items to the cart by streamlining the process and offering further discounts for additional items.

tools that help website designers face the difficult challenge of displaying multiple fonts while sticking with a site's branded look.

the launch of the Bakers' Banter Blog.

This year, 32 videos were also posted to the website to help customers better appreciate the "farm-to-plate" relationship with mostly Midwestern farmers who supply much of the grain for King Arthur's flours.

Born in Cleveland and raised in New York City, London and San Francisco and eventually Vermont, Silver was a math major at Wesleyan University. She moved through a number of posts centered on Web technology, including the former Internet shopping