

# First, it was a hot dog stand; now, it's all Tasty Catering

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Medill News Service

For Tasty Catering Inc.'s co-founder Tom Walter, the decision to work in the food industry was a natural one.

## Success stories

"I'm one of 11 children," he said. "There was never enough food on the table, so I decided to get in the food business early on."

Lack of food is no longer a problem for Walter: his Elk Grove Village-based Tasty Catering booked sales of about \$5 million last year and moved into a new 23,000-square-foot facility.

The company racked up about 8,000 catering jobs last year, up 35 percent from 2004, according to the company. Walter said in its 10 years in

### Business profile

**Business:** Tasty Catering Inc.

**Co-owners:** Tom, Larry and Kevin Walter

**Location:** Elk Grove Village

**Web site:**  
www.tastycatering.com

**2005 revenue:** \$5 million

Source: Tasty Catering

business, Tasty Catering has averaged 27 percent growth per year.

And it has attracted some large corporate customers.

"They've never let me down — ever," said Dawn Briggs, administrative assistant and vice president for marketing at Oak Brook-based True Value Corp., a frequent customer.

Having established itself in the corporate catering market,

Walter said his firm is branching out into other food-related businesses, including private food labeling and demonstrations and distribution at shopping centers.

It is also developing subsidiary TF Processors Inc., which will include gift-basket distribution.

However, Tasty Catering owes its roots to humbler times. Its story began when a 22-year-old Walter left Loyola University in 1971 and sank his savings of about \$20,000 into his first business, a hot dog stand named Tasty Pup in Elk Grove Village.

Tasty Pup later gave way to other ventures, including fast-food style restaurant Tasty Dawg, where Walter brought in brothers Larry and Kevin as partners. They opened three Tasty Dawgs.

Tasty Catering began as a way of preparing deli trays and picnics for Tasty Dawg customers



JOE LEWNARD/DAILY HERALD

Tasty Catering co-owner Tom Walter is expanding the business at its Elk Grove Village headquarters.

and broke out as a viable company in 1995 with five employees.

With the company growing steadily, Tasty Catering's owners recently decided to focus their efforts solely on the catering and related ventures, selling the last Tasty Dawg in May 2005.

Walter attributes Tasty Catering's success to his employees, the company's corporate culture and its focus on the corporate catering market.

The Walters are sons of a

former vice president of quality assurance at Zenith Radio Corp., something Tom Walter said influenced his business thinking.

"They were known for exceptional quality, Zenith televisions and (my father) preached to us quality, quality, quality," Tom Walter said.

In developing the culture of the company, Walter and the Tasty Catering management

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## Success: Ownership is key

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concluded that every employee should be given at least one thing to be in charge of. Then the employee is free to try whatever the worker wants within that circle of responsibility.

"You allow people to maximize their talents," Tom Walter said. "They become very good at what they do. If they're going to be the pot scrubber, they're going to scrub the pot perfectly,

because they will be rewarded by it."

For employees, Tasty Catering has installed a company-wide rewards system that includes a growth-based, profit-sharing plan; a 401(k) plan; and real estate investments with employees. Tasty Catering also pays for employees to enroll in work-related classes and training programs. Although the company's current growth rate is impressive, Walter says it's controlled.