



BEAU CABELL/THE TELEGRAPH

L.E. Schwartz & Son employees turn one of the company's large warehouses into a party hall of industrial proportions last Saturday as they prepare eggnog for the company's annual party.

Using their nog-in

L.E. Schwartz & Son history

- 1910: Louis Erwin Schwartz starts company in Macon
- 1915: Schwartz's brother-in-law, Adolph Phaul, joins company, which becomes Schwartz & Phaul
- 1918: First eggnog party is held at old Plum Street location
- 1929: Schwartz's son, Harry, joins company, which expands to include HVAC
- 1933: Phaul dies and company becomes L.E. Schwartz & Son; eggnog legal again after prohibition ends
- 1949: Louis Schwartz dies, Harry Schwartz takes the reins
- 1952: Melvin Kruger joins company after graduating from University of Georgia law school
- 1978: Steve Kruger joins company
- 1987: Selection as National Roofing Contractor of the Year
- 1991: Precision Products begins manufacturing
- 1994: Precision Products becomes Schwartz Precision Manufacturing
- 1997: Harry Schwartz dies
- 2001: Gold Circle Award from the National Roofing Contractor's Association
- 2004: Michael Kruger becomes fifth generation to join company

Annual Christmas party kicks off Schwartz & Son's centennial celebration

By LIZ FABIAN
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When Louis Erwin Schwartz arrived in Macon from Hungary, he had little more than a soldering pot. Looking over the handlebars of his motorcycle, the sheet metal worker and craftsman likely had no idea what lay ahead for him and his descendants.

Nearly 100 years later, the company that bears his name is thriving with three divisions, national recognition and Schwartz's great-great grandson marking the fifth generation in the family business.

L.E. Schwartz & Son expanded from a sheet metal and commercial roofing company to include Schwartz Precision Manufacturing in the 1990s and Schwartz Residential Roofing, which opened earlier this year.

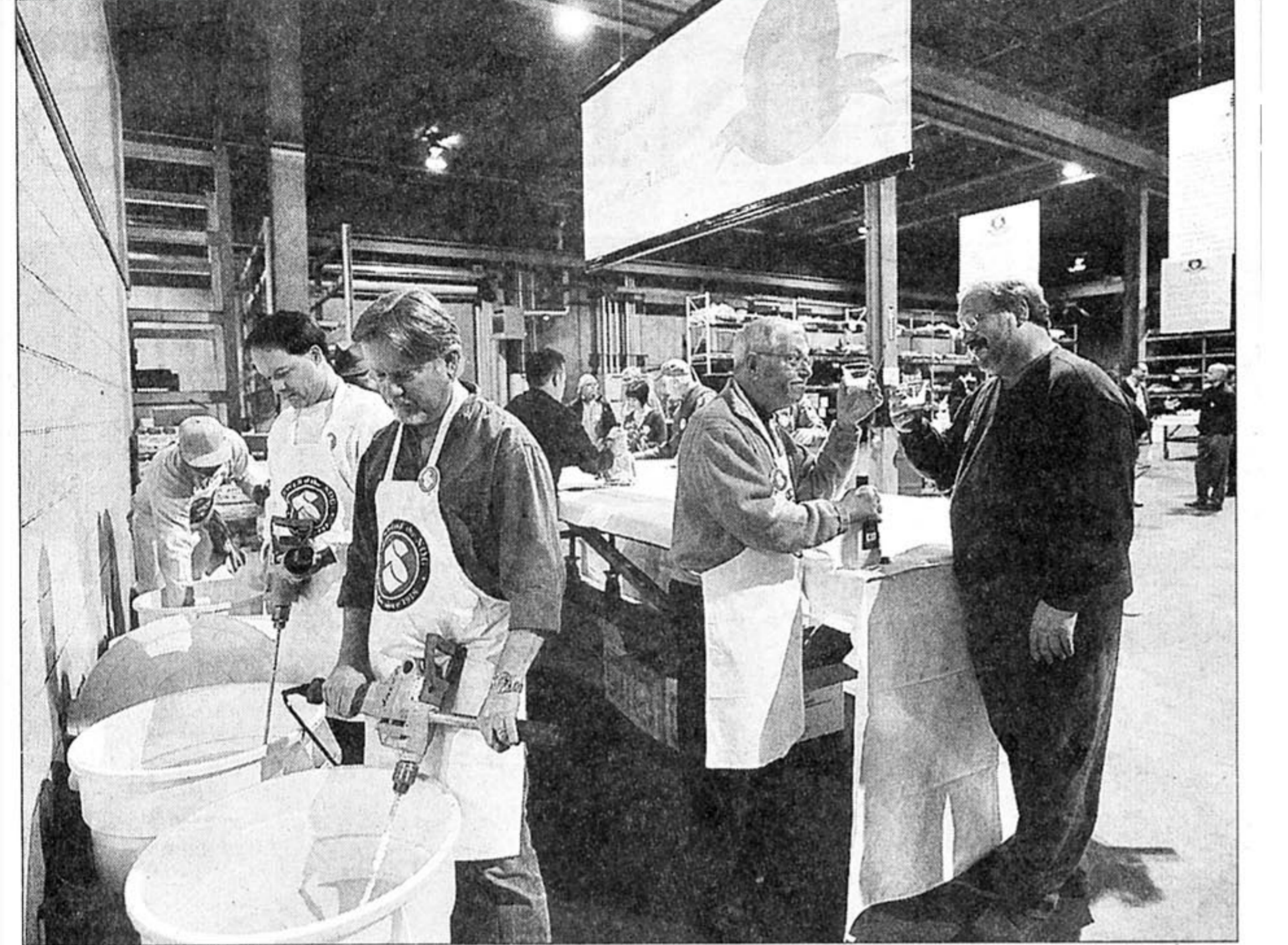
In 1918, Schwartz began celebrating his success by hosting a "gathering of men" with pound cake and homemade eggnog on Christmas Eve morning at the company's original location on Plum Street. The holiday social gathering that began with a handful of fellows has now grown to a guest list of more than a thousand and the event is now traditionally held the morning of the second Saturday of December.

As it turns 100, the company is as strong as the 140 gallons of eggnog they churned with industrial drills for this year's party.

Hundreds of people gathered on the concrete floor of the warehouse to mingle through the crowd rubbing elbows with a congressman, mayors and a retired general.

The local, state and national leaders

SEE EGGNOG, 2D



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Dan Slagle, left, and Elliott Dunwody help make eggnog last Saturday at L.E. Schwartz & Son's annual Christmas party.

EGGNOG, FROM 1D

joined contractors, businessmen and laborers for the eggnog that is mixed in 30 gallon drums and dipped from punch bowls.

"We don't mean for people to think we're leaving them out but it's people we do business with and close friends," said company president Steve Kruger. "The list began to grow exponentially. The party has grown with the company."

Some of that party growth was met with a little resistance, said CEO Melvin Kruger, Schwartz's grandson and Steve's father.

"We thought of it as a guy thing," Melvin Kruger said. "We only started inviting women in the 90s."

"By revolt," Steve Kruger added with a smile. "It's never been a spouse party."

In 1998, after several influential ladies began to strong-arm the Krugers, the party was opened to professional women.

The Krugers feared the women would critique the rough industrial decor and no-frills party with a smattering of pecans and peanuts to munch.

This year was an exception as they decorated the warehouse with placards hanging from the ceiling. Each denoted historical events from 10 decades in recognition of the company's centennial celebration kick off.

The Krugers unveiled a print of "Schwartz City," a fictional representation of 61 buildings that exemplify their efforts.

The towering Park Avenue Condominiums and Buckhead Plaza skyscraper in Atlanta contrast with the sprawling Cooper Tire plant in Albany and the Tubman African American Museum still under construction in Macon.

From one man who pioneered the flat asphalt roofing world in Middle Georgia, the client list has grown to include Boeing, Trane, Blue Bird Bus Co. and Caterpillar.

The precision manufacturing division has crafted fish cookers, self-service karaoke booths and the new marquis on Macon's Grand Opera House.

If there is one key to the evolution of the company, Melvin Kruger credits his grandfather's personality.

"He was a real people person," said the 80-year-old Kruger. "He loved to

to pursue a career as an attorney.

He had just taken the bar exam when a devastating tornado hit Warner Robins in 1953 and he never practiced law.

"That tornado changed the business entirely because we were in a position to grow and expand it and that changed my perspective," Kruger said.

Now his grandson, Michael Kruger, 27, has come on board as an assistant project manager.

"It's been very exciting to be here with Steven and Michael and the people in this company keep me young," he said.

The family eggnog recipe has been closely-guarded since Steve Kruger wrote it down in 1978, but he freely shares the secret of their family business success.

"It's because of dad's nature — letting people do

their job and coaching rather than telling someone how to do it," Steve Kruger said. "There's no jealousy or animosity because we're all pulling in the same direction."

"We all seem to be on the same page," said Michael Kruger, who unveiled the print of "Schwartz City" at the party.

Copies of the print were given to guests along with a commemorative eggnog mug.

Although World War II interrupted the tradition for a few years, the famous brew survived prohibition with some of the best moonshine the sheriff's office confiscated during those years.

When the party comes to an end at about lunchtime, the remaining eggnog is distributed in jars.

"We always like it when people take some home,"

Melvin Kruger said.

Macon Economic Development Commission executive Pat Topping said the variety of guests represent the Krugers' involvement in the community.

"The first time I came to one I was just amazed. Everybody is here — black, white, the business community — everybody," Topping said. "It brings people together in a non-formal atmosphere."

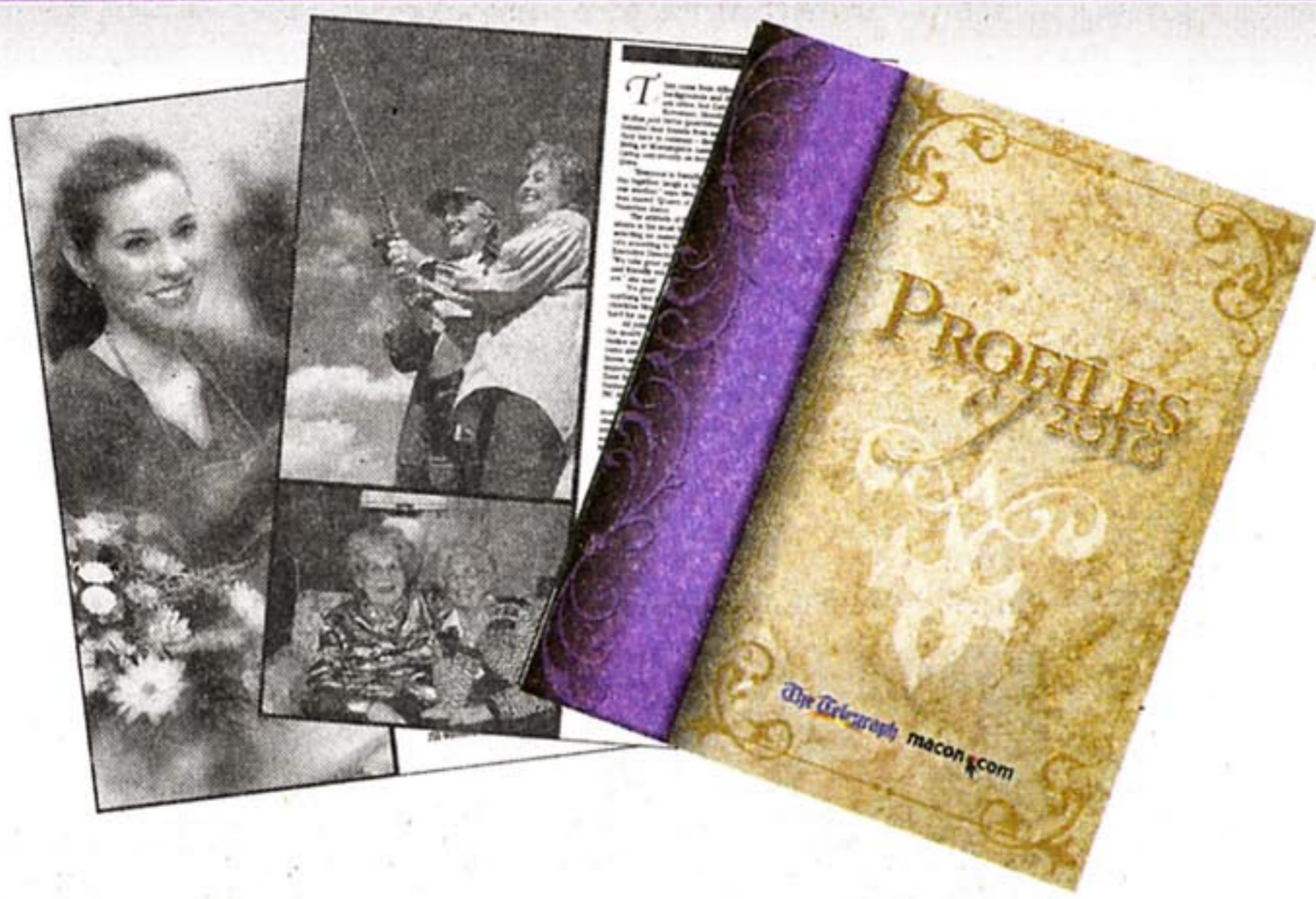
Before leaving this year's bash, Topping told Melvin Kruger: "I came back to Macon because of families like yours."

This year's party seemed to be the best place to toast the company's success.

"At no time do we have this many customers and vendors in one place so we thought it would be the perfect time to begin the celebration," Michael Kruger said.

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