

Gourmet popcorn popper dead at 88

CORONADO, Calif. (AP) — Orville Redenbacher, a onetime county agriculture agent who developed a multimillion-dollar line of gourmet popcorn and became a TV advertising star, was found dead in his apartment today. He was 88.

He was found in his bathtub around 6 a.m., said Coronado City Manager Homer Bludau.

The cause and time of death were under investigation by the Medical Examiner's Office.

Redenbacher, known for his trademark glasses and bow tie, was an advertising spokesman who was also The Real Thing;

an agribusinessman and scientist who worked at improving lines of corn for years before he began selling gourmet popcorn on TV. He estimated he cross-bred 30,000 hybrids over 40 years before coming up with his own gourmet line.

"It'll be a great loss," said William E. Smith, executive director of the Chicago-based Popcorn Institute, who knew Reden-



Redenbacher

bacher for 43 years.

He and his partner sold the Orville Redenbacher brand in the mid-1970s for a reported \$2 million but remained star of its advertising.

A native of Indiana, Redenbacher grew popcorn on his family's farm to earn extra spending money as a youngster. He graduated from Purdue University in 1928 with a degree in agronomy, and then worked as a county agricultural agent.

He later organized and managed the 12,000-acre Princeton Farms, where he started production of commercial popcorn in 1943.

Redenbacher's popcorn career took off when he teamed with Chester Bowman and bought Chester Inc., a diversified agricultural company in Valparaiso, Ind. At first, he sold what he called "the first gourmet popping corn" himself, traveling by car across the country.

He and Bowman had sold popcorn in the "Redbow" brand, from their last name, in the early 1970s, an advertising agent decided to make the folksy Redenbacher the focus of the advertising.

In interviews Redenbacher said his focus of popcorn developed in the family when he was a child.

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