

RALPH KETNER



Ralph Ketner learned the ins and outs of the grocery business as he grew up working in his father's butcher shop and grocery store in Salisbury, N.C., and working for his older brother, Glenn, at his grocery store in Kannapolis.

Ketner attended high school in Rowan County and attended Tri-State College in Angola, Indiana, for two years. He also later served in the Army and was stationed in Africa and Italy during World War II. After Glenn sold his grocery stores in 1956, Ralph Ketner, Brown Ketner and Wilson Smith raised enough capital to open their own grocery store, Food Town, in Salisbury, N.C.

In the first decade, Food Town grew to seven stores and had annual sales of \$5 million in 1967. In order to increase his profit, Ketner – who served as the chairman and CEO – came up with the “lowest food prices in North Carolina” strategy, increasing sales to \$8.5 million in 1968, \$15 million in 1969 and \$22 million in 1970. By 1983, the grocery store chain's annual sales hit \$1 billion, and shortly thereafter, a Belgian supermarket chain, Delhaize, bought controlling interest in Food Town and renamed it Food Lion. Ketner resigned from the company in April 1991.

Over the years, Ketner has received numerous awards and recognitions, two of which he most values including his 1990 National Entrepreneur of the Year Award and inclusion in the 2002 “One of 50 Visionaries in the U.S. Supermarket Industry.” In addition two business schools have been named in his honor, including the Ralph W. Ketner School of Business at Catawba College, and the Ketner School of Business at Trine University in Angola, Indiana.