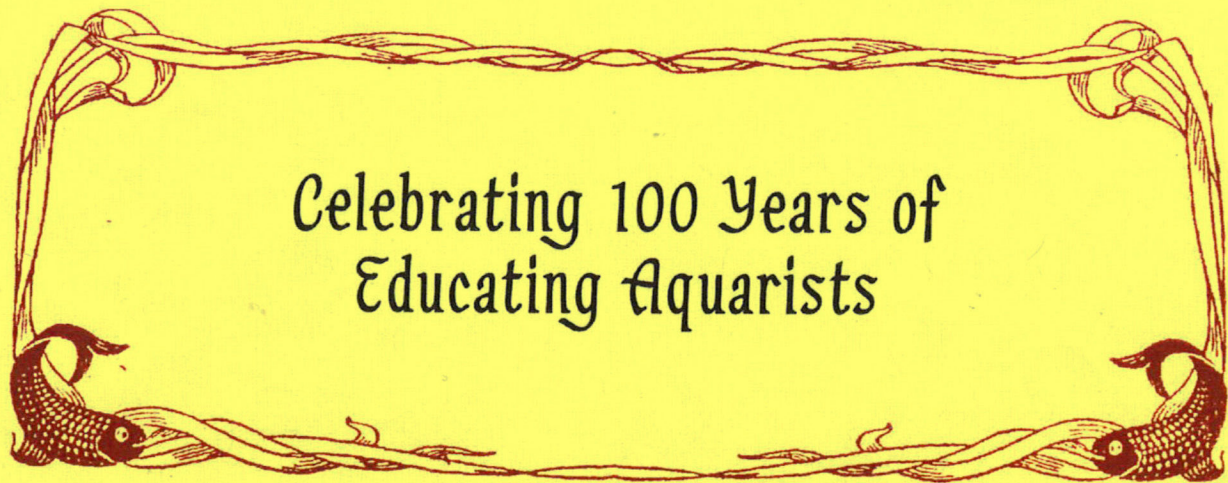


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# The History of San Francisco Bay Brand Inc., and Ocean Nutrition USA

Andy Schmidt

President, San Francisco Bay Brand Inc., Ocean Nutrition USA

When I started, I was around five years old. In 1957, my father, who was a tool and die maker, had been working at a shop repairing aquariums with my mom for a few years.

They decided to open their own business.

In those days, everything was made by hand from roll monel steel and hand-cut glass and sometimes slate. The metal was cut with foot shears and bent with hand breaks.

Next, the glass was cut. Most of the glass was cut by hand in the beginning; it was much later, in the early 60s, before glass came in crates and precut.

The frame was then spot welded using a square hand-held jig; first, the legs and the top was placed. Then it was squared up by banging it on the table and stacked on a rack to go to the tar process.

The tar was a **Pecora Cement**, and it was cut from the cardboard kegs and then broken into smaller pieces with an ax. The pieces were placed in a square pot built into a slate table, and it had a gas burner beneath it to warm the cement until it was pliable enough to dip the individual pieces of glass, starting with the larger sides and then the ends and finally the bottom.

The individual pieces were pressed in one by one on the slate table covered with a powder that did not allow the tar to stick, and then a putty knife was used after the frame was squared to clean the excess tar off the frame and glass before it was cleaned with thinner and then wiped down and put on the stack.

The hoods were a separate process coming off the shear and then being bent on drop leaf break. The end pieces and the back plates were bent, and then the reliefs were punched where the airlines and the heaters could be placed into the tank.

The hoods were then wired and wrapped with paper and placed with the tank.

There were some piston pumps most people used back in those days, and then things like the **Silent Giant** sand-filled air pumps changed that all overnight.

There were some corner filters and some under gravel types, but that was about it. The Japanese had some trickle filters built into hoods, but they were not popular in the US.

The company finally merged with some groups of individuals from the East Coast, like **Wil-Nes**, **Grolux**, **Longlife**, and a host of others that finally became **Metaframe** around 1967.

It ended up with 13 partners, **Irving Gaul**, **Allan and Harding Willinger**, **Harold Nestler**, and my father, **Anton Schmidt**, who ran the west coast operations with **Seymour Bergen**.

This is when things really started to change, as there were a few other manufacturers, such as **Oscar** and **Pemco**, on the West Coast, but no one had sold nationally up to this time.

The **Willinger Brothers** began designing all kinds of new items, from air pumps to **Bubble Up corner filters**, **Dynaflor 400, 410**, and so on.

Next, the parts for the tanks would come precut in crates for most of the popular sizes, 5,10,15,20,26 long. Every size larger than these were still being custom-made from scratch up to 150 gallon, which was about as big as anyone could handle safely.

Betta tanks and turtle tanks were custom-made also, as the top rails needed to be notched for the glass inserts to separate the cells.

Wrought iron stands gave way to sheet metal as it looked more modern and was cheaper to make. They would come knocked down like the old wrought iron stands and still had to be put back together, but they were much easier to handle and stack in the warehouse.

Next thing you know, the company had everything from light bulbs, heaters, paint for backgrounds, lead weights for plants, and then the whole plastic plant thing came along.

Then there were foods, brine shrimp eggs, and almost everything anybody needed in the hobby, all under one roof.

Around 1970, **Pemco** was bought and later shut down as the new facility put up in 1966 was sufficient to handle the entire West Coast.

**San Francisco Fish Farms** was purchased by **Metaframe**, and **San Francisco Bay Brand** was founded. The company had about 80,000 dollars in sales and delivered live brine shrimp to stores thru local jobbers.

The closing of **Pemco** was the birth of **ASU Distribution**, which later dominated most of the West Coast.

During this time, after **Metaframe**, **Tetra** was being promoted, and small little yellow and brown sample bottles were being stuffed into every blister pack for each aquarium set being sold to **Gemco**, **Whitefront**, and **Sears Garden** centers.

**Metaframe** advertised in *Life Magazine*, which was a really big deal! For the first time, the aquatic hobby was presented to the masses in a National publication.

Then **Mattel Toys** came along, and major changes continued. Not that Mattel knew anything about the hobby, but it had money and wanted to be a major player.

Now injection molded frames and silicone became the standard, and the metal framed tanks were going by the wayside as they were too expensive to produce with the minimum federal wage at about \$1.15.

If I do not skip forward here at some point, the story will become a book. So let's move forward to **Mattel** getting into trouble with the SEC and having to sell off all the various pieces of **Metaframe**.

The **Rolf C. Hagen Company** purchased the **Living World** label along with **Habitrail**. My father bought **San Francisco Bay Brand** in 1979 and **Metaframe**.

**San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** started to manufacture its own line of dry products to promote and compete in the market.

There was also **Wardleys** which, along with **Hartz**, became the dominant products in the fish food market along with **Tetra**.

As **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** was now producing frozen product, the association with **Mattel** allowed **Metaframe** to place over 10,000 little chest freezers in almost every pet shop in the United

States.

The flake products were outsourced, and the flake plant was shut down so the company could concentrate on frozen fish foods.

**San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** only had one product, brine shrimp, and it was not until 1986 that the company contracted the **Murex Company** of Canada to co-package Plankton and Krill for **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.**

Around 1987 a small company popped up in San Diego which was called **Ocean Nutrition**. It was started by **Chris Turk**, who had been a grad student at FIT, where he met guys like **Ed Mowka** and **Tom Frakes**, who later made **Instant Ocean** successful, and **Frank Hoff**, who had an aquaculture supply company in Florida. What they all were doing at FIT at that time was working on tank-raised marine fish.

What came from that is a food which was later being used as a continuation of the project for Sea World in San Diego. Chris started to sell the product to some of the local stores, and it started to catch on with some of the marine hobbyists who, until now, had only a single ingredient product such as brine shrimp, to feed.

The product was a mix of foods and bound with gelatin.

From there, another product called Formula Two was created for omnivore species of fish, and it never stopped progressing.

**San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** was involved in aquaculture at the time, being one of the largest suppliers of brine shrimp cysts around the world for fish and shrimp farming which was finally starting to catch stride commercially.

Sure, there were companies like **Coke** who played with growing shrimp in Columbia and small projects in Mexico, but in its infancy, the large companies decided to pull out and let all the little guys go through the heartaches and expense and then buy them out later.

Companies like **BP**, **Trow**, **Purina**, and the list goes on of multinational companies that were doing aquaculture also.

Aside from enriching baby brine shrimp and selectively harvesting cysts for higher fatty acid profiles, the nutritional research went to supplementing live foods at the larval stage so more cost-effective grow out could be obtained. This was just the beginning stages at this time.

Most aquaculture work until now was with salmonoids, run by companies like **Warehouser**, who were still doing open sea type farming as it was easy, but the returns were low.

Frankly, it was a good thing pen farms sprang up as many hatchery stocks were mixing with wild stock, and this still a problem that exists today.

The good part about all this is the technology was advancing for things like cold extrusion, soft, moist, and different types of feed additives, from Stable CTM to beta-glucans, omega fats, and a whole lot of things that have found their way into our aquarium hobby.

**San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** spent years with research projects for tank raising and enriching artemia with everything from antibiotics to spirulina and omega fats.

We started to market these products, while at the same time, we developed some of our own formula foods in the late 80s.

Since that time, **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** has bought about 75 new frozen foods for the hobbyist to choose from. We have also purchased **Murex** in Canada and still enrich almost the entire Canadian Bring shrimp production.

One of the things which really changed the ordinary day-to-day frozen food business was the introduction of Chironomids, or non-biting species of midge fly larvae, otherwise known to most of us by the name Bloodworms.

As brine shrimp was the predominant food in the US due to **Metaframe's** success and thereafter San Francisco Bay Brand Inc., the only brine shrimp anywhere in the Eastern countries or in Europe, came from the US, and mostly from **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.**

The most readily common available product everywhere else in the world was Bloodworms. Since Brine shrimp comes from a highly saline environment, they are very clean of bacteria.

Bloodworms, on the other hand, are found and harvested from the mud in rivers from around the world, many in China, Poland, and Russia. Since they are native to fresh water, they are not afforded the same environment as brine shrimp and need to have more processing steps before they can be called clean.

This may include several processes, from pro-biotics sterilized water systems, and purging of the gut.

In the late 80s, I tried to introduce these little critters live, but no one was having any part of it here in the US. During all these years in the US, aside from brine shrimp, one of the staple foods for hatcheries, breeders, and hobbyists was tubifex worms. I am talking about the "red tubifex," which many people did not realize were harvested in Mexico from sewers and wastewater and carried many diseases.

Later the "black worms" also became popular as they were from fresh cold water hatcheries for trout and salmon. There was only one guy I knew who could farm raise them, but I have not spoken with him in years, and nature did not treat him well.

Recently **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** bought **Ocean Nutrition**. **Ocean Nutrition** had been sold to a company in Salt Lake City. The owners of this business were the original biologists that were employed by **San Francisco Bay Brands'** research division which was in charge of developing intensive culture systems to grow artemia and semi-extensive culture systems (pond) for artemia.

These projects were shut down after several years of research and led to the sales of enriched product to commercial shrimp farmers for use in Maturation to close the cycle of breeding and avoid virus issues.

Salt Creek operated **Ocean Nutrition** for several years and expanded the company's product lines to include flake and pellet foods, first under contract and then in-house.

**San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** bought **Ocean Nutrition** in 2009 and is in the process of bringing production back to the US this year.

Interestingly enough, the same staff which **San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.** worked with at the Artemia Reference Center in Ghent, Belgium, are the same people who revamped and worked the entire **Ocean Nutrition** product line with their 30 years of aquaculture nutritional experience while at a company called **INVE**.

We have come full circle to have started with a single product 42 years ago to almost 300 SKUs of frozen and dry products produced by some of the most technical people in the feed world. That is a lot of change and progress.

The buyers and hobbyists have become much more sophisticated. Like with everything else in the US, everyone wants and expects the best. People want the best lighting, the best filtration, the nicest and hardest-to-find fish.

All of this has led to much higher standards of production, research, and good competition.

It has been a fascinating ride for me, from making animal cages and small aquariums when I was a kid working in the shop to watching the progression of bubble corner filters make the way to bio drums, trickle filters, UV systems, and good lighting.

Working around the globe with commercial farmers and lab techs to hatch better cysts, and make better foods with good nutrition, I have been blessed to experience all of this change. The people whom I have met around the world also in the business have been a lifetime of memories that most people never get to experience.

I think the best thing that happened to my business is kids. In all the years of having been in this business, going to the shows open to the general public, such as America's Family Pet Show which was founded by WWPSA (now WPA – World Pet Association) in the early 80s, was one of the best things just to see kids who had a genuine interest in something live and exciting.

We (WWPSA) brought that show back during my 17-year tenure with SSPSA.

During that time, it was my pleasure to have served as the president of the Pet Care Trust (PCT) for six years. PCT ran a program that certified teachers to handle animals of all types in the classroom.

I think it is our obligation to make sure kids get the opportunity to educate themselves as to the proper care of animals. It is the duty of society to carry this on, not to ban it or regulate it out of existence.

Where can we go with a generation of kids who think milk comes from a carton at the store??

I think the worst thing to happen to my business is the lack of support from the trade association. Rather than promote the hobby on a grassroots basis and get to know the real issues at hand, they put their efforts and our money into promoting themselves, but not to the public.

On the other hand, if you go to a reptile show, there are thousands of kids there who are just wild to have the opportunity to engage themselves with something alive and new or familiar.

What is better than a hobby which teaches life through responsibility, biology, and chemistry? What parent would argue with that? None, and if they had the opportunity to take their kids to a place where they can see beautiful home aquariums set up and how easy they can be, they would be believers.

There are 137 public aquariums doing very well. They do not mix with our industry, though, as a whole. The hobbyists, for the most part, in our industry do not mix with the retailer, wholesaler or manufacturer. Maybe it is just the lack of opportunity.

However, if there are hundreds of clubs out there who ask for our support, why is there, not an action by the national clubs to bring all of these clubs under one 501C to get some clout and recognition?

If we can give kids a place to go with their parents and experience what the hobby could be, we will have a future. It is that or the only fish they will ever see soon will be on their iPhone.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our history and some of my views. I have been in this hobby for the better part of my life, and I would like to thank you for the valuable part of it that you contribute to, which helps keep us all going.

All the very best,

*Andy Schmidt*

President,  
San Francisco Bay Brand Inc.  
Ocean Nutrition USA