

Ralph Stayer, 92, Popularizer of Bratwurst

MILWAUKEE, June 26 (AP) — Ralph F. Stayer, the founder of a Wisconsin sausage company that helped popularize bratwurst in the United States, died Sunday in Florida. He was 92.

He died in his sleep at a nursing home, his family said.

Mr. Stayer bought a butcher shop in 1945 and turned it into the million-dollar Johnsonville Sausage Company, said his son, Ralph C. Stayer, the company's current chief executive.

Mr. Stayer was born in Ely, Minn., in 1915 and moved to Milwaukee as a teenager. He dropped out of high school a month before graduation to support his parents and five younger siblings during the Depression.

Mr. Stayer's butcher shop was struggling in 1945, when he went to a picnic and saw garbage cans filled with partly eaten brats. He and his

wife drew upon their Austrian and Slovenian heritage to make better-tasting bratwurst, a spiced pork sausage, based on an old family recipe, his son said.

Johnsonville Sausage became a multimillion-dollar business under the leadership of Mr. Stayer's son. Its brats are sold seasonally at about 4,000 McDonald's and in 16 N.F.L. stadiums.

The sausage company is the main sponsor of Brat Fest, an annual event in Madison in which participants eat nearly 190,000 brats in four days over the Memorial Day weekend.

Besides his son, his survivors include his wife, the former Alice Brinkman; a daughter, Launa Stayer-Maloney; 10 grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren; and 3 brothers, John, Raymond and Robert.

