

# Mebane City Beat: The Makers of Modern Mebane

BY KELLY HUNTER  
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS OF ORANGE

Preserving a community or municipality's history is vital to understanding its way of life, how the past has shaped its present, and learning what mistakes to avoid to create a more prosperous societal path. Mebane, North Carolina's history is rich and continues to blossom and grow.

The City of Mebane began in the early 19th century when a post office was established in 1809. The town was named for Brigadier General Alexander Mebane of the North Carolina Militia and a member of Congress in the 1790s. In 1855, the railroad arrived, and Mebane was incorporated in 1881 as the town of Mebanesville. The name was officially changed to Mebane in 1883, and the charter was amended to the City of Mebane in February 1987.

Did you know Mebane used to be a town? Or that growth in the Mebane community did not truly begin until roughly 50 years after the railroad arrived in 1855? Thanks to brothers William and David White, the White Furniture Company was founded in 1881 and put the small town of roughly 200 citizens on the map. The White Furniture Company was one of the earliest furniture manufacturers in the Piedmont region and, along with tobacco production, would continue to prosper and draw people to the Mebane community for years to come. With industrial growth came population growth and the evolution of our positively charming community that now serves as home to over 20,000 residents.

City officials and residents realized the importance of preserving our history early on. Thus, in 2001, a committee called the Mebane Historical Society was formed to discuss ways to protect and share the stories of individuals, businesses, and developments that helped shape the Mebane community. Then, in 2010, the Mebane Historical Museum was established and given a permanent home in the Old Rec to create a safe space for newcomers, tourists, or residents to learn about our city's unique history. The Mebane Historical Museum aims to collect, preserve, and exhibit all manners of Mebane's cultural and historical past. Mebane's vast and vibrant history is presented to individuals today through exhibitions, special events, and free public programs.

Now that the community had somewhere to see Mebane's history and learn about its roots physically, a new question emerged about recognizing select individuals whose impact left a lasting mark on the community. At the urging of the Mebane City Council in 2011, after several individuals in the community deemed of particular importance had passed, a program called Makers of Modern Mebane was established. This program would serve as an annual collaboration between the City and the Mebane Historical Museum to acknowledge specific individuals' impact on Mebane's evolu-



COURTESY OF THE CITY OF MEBANE

tion. During this time, Traci Davenport was hired to serve as the Executive Director for the Mebane Historical Museum. So, she, Museum Board President Ron Oakley, and Everette Greene, a council member, formed the Makers of Modern Mebane Committee and put together the first "class" of inductees named into the program.

Today, the Makers of Modern Mebane Committee comprises Mebane Historical Museum staff, a current Museum Board member, a community member, and a Mebane city official. Community members make nominations throughout the year, and in their nominations, an essay or compelling letter is written detailing the contributions made to the city or community by the person they are nominating. Nominees can be both living and deceased. To be considered a Maker of Modern Mebane, the qualifications are as follows: Did this individual make an impact, a difference, or a change to the community through their work, passion, or personal integrity? If the answer is yes, then they qualify for the program! Executive Director of the Mebane Historical Museum Traci Davenport stated, "Many assume this is an award for the movers and shakers of Mebane, but that could not be further from the truth. More importantly to me, frequently, it is the lesser-known people who worked quietly in the background with little to no fanfare. They are my favorite inductees."

All nominations must be received by the museum by February 28 each year. The Makers of Modern Mebane Committee typically chooses three to four inductees by the end of May, and an induction ceremony is held. The induction ceremony is hosted at the Mebane Historical Museum, 209 W. Jackson St., and family members are invited to attend. Each individual chosen to become a Maker of Modern Mebane has a photo reproduced

to match the gallery of other inductee photos and includes a written biography put together through careful interviewing and researching. The portrait and biography are showcased during the ceremony, and a family member or someone who knew the inductee well can speak about the person's achievements. The ceremony is open to the public, and a reception is held afterward. After the ceremony, all Makers of Modern Mebane inductees will have their photos and narratives hung in the museum's main entry hallway for that year. Once the year is up and a new group of individuals has been selected, the previous year's inductees will join the permanent installation in the main gallery. The permanent installation includes all the inductees ever recognized and their accompanying biographies.

Receiving a nomination to become a Maker of Modern Mebane is an overwhelming and joyous accomplishment. Some individuals who have been nominated and inducted into the program include the very first female on the Mebane City Council, some of the first Mebane residents, schoolteachers, firefighters, Sandi Bagby, a city employee responsible for Mebane's parks, landscaping, and special projects, and more. The next Makers of Modern Mebane ceremony will be on Thursday, July 18, at 6 p.m. This year's induction ceremony recipients include J. Ronald Oakley, a local historian, author, and one of the Mebane Historical Museum's founders. Edwin Yoder, Jr., a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author, and John McIntyre, founder of Reliable Furniture and board member of Mebane's First Savings & Loan, credited with getting the thrift through the depression safely and successfully.

For more information on the Makers of Modern Mebane program or the Mebane Historical Museum, visit [www.mebanehistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.mebanehistoricalmuseum.org).

## MORINAGA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

on Orange County and North Carolina many years ago, helping to diversify our tax base and bring strong top-quality jobs to our residents. We value their initiative and look forward to many more decades of partnership. And their candy is really delicious, too. Local supermarkets have it. My husband and I like to share the smaller bag."

Morinaga America Foods agreed in 2013 to locate in Orange County and built a 100,000 square foot manufacturing plant. The company employs approximately 204 associates and has a current county property tax valuation of \$31.6 million.

Morinaga & Co., Ltd., was founded in 1899 in Tokyo, Japan, and is a major international confectionary and candy maker. The firm is Asia's equivalent to a Hershey's, Mars or Nestle. Morinaga is aggressively marketing HI-CHEW across the United States and has successful store displays at Target,

"Orange County is excited for this additional investment by Morinaga. They took a chance on Orange County and North Carolina many years ago, helping to diversify our tax base and bring strong top-quality jobs to our residents. We value their initiative and look forward to many more decades of partnership. And their candy is really delicious, too. Local supermarkets have it. My husband and I like to share the smaller bag."

**Jamezetta Bedford**  
Board of Orange County Chair

Costco, 7-Eleven and major grocery store chains. Orange County Economic Development Director Steve Brantley said the company considered

locations in Taiwan and China, where the company has existing HI-CHEW factories, and had also researched building a new facility in Vietnam, before choosing to expand in Orange County.

The Board of Commissioners will consider a county incentive when the Board reconvenes in the Fall.

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