

Milo's in love but...

General Mills upset by Betty's affair with Amin in comic strip

By CAROLINE PETRICH
Of the Emerald

Betty Crocker is not just a pretty face on a cardboard cake box. She really does exist — sort of.

Mercedes Bates, vice president of General Mills Co. and director of the Betty Crocker Kitchens, represents Betty Crocker's image. She graduated from Oregon State University with a home economics degree in 1936.

The alumni office at OSU refers to Bates as Betty Crocker, but Bates explains that Betty Crocker was born in 1921 because of an advertising ploy. As part of that advertising campaign, General Mills, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., sponsored a contest asking housewives to piece together a jigsaw puzzle and submit it to the company.

The prize for the feat was a pincushion shaped like a flour sack.

Not only did the puzzles come back, but culinary questions like "Why won't my bread rise?" also were sent in. General Mills hired technicians to write responses — but who would sign the responses?

The guru of cooking should be a woman, the company decided. Now all it needed was a name. "Crocker" was chosen to honor Minneapolis' first flour mill, and "Betty" was a

popular name of that era. Voila!

Sixty years later, the mythical homemaker is the apple pie of Milo Bloom's eye in the syndicated strip "Bloom County," which the Emerald began printing this fall. Milo, an outspoken schoolchild, calls the search for his love "A Quest for Lost America."

"I look for a way of life... I look for tradition... motherhood... family... single career marriages!" expounds Milo. "I look for simpler days of an America that was!"

Bates returns Milo's affection, calling his quest "very funny and cute."

"I love the one about Nancy Reagan," Bates says with a laugh. She refers to an episode where Milo discusses the purpose of his quest with a hobo. The hobo suggests Nancy Reagan as a possible sweetie instead.

"I want apple pie and you give me twinkies with hollandaise sauce," Milo screams.

But Bates disapproves of cartoonist Berke Breathed's linking Betty Crocker and former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Milo originally discovers the "culinary cutie" is an actual person in a National Enquirer story: "Fabled homemaker discovered in secret love

nest with Idi Amin."

"I thought that was a little nasty," Bates says. "We treat Betty with great respect and tenderness."

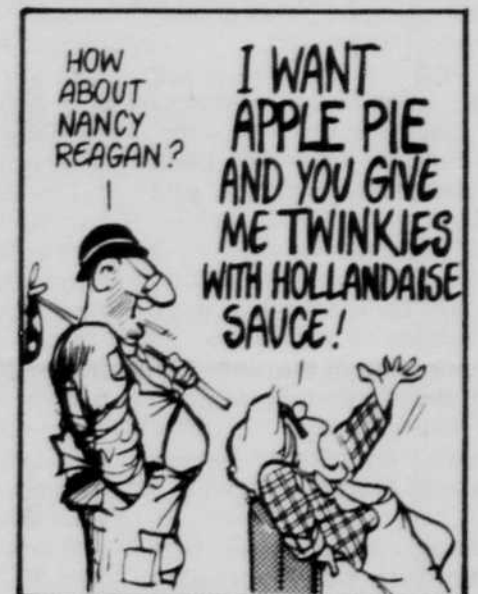
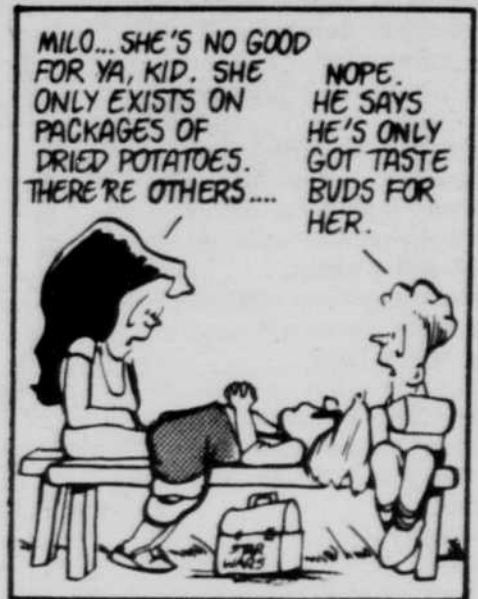
Bates did not begin her food career as Betty Crocker. After graduating from OSU, she went on to become food editor of McCall's magazine.

In 1964, Bates was named company vice president by General Mills, the first woman executive in the company's history. She also oversees the Betty Crocker Food and Nutrition Center that incorporates the kitchen, nutrition center and publication department, handles consumer queries and writes the Betty Crocker cookbooks.

The Portland native has received many honors throughout her career, including National Delta Zeta Woman of the Year in 1970, president of the American Home Economics Association in 1970-71 and an honorary citation from OSU in 1973.

"She certainly is representative of what a woman can be," says Billy Webb, assistant to the dean of the School of Home Economics at OSU.

As for cooking, Milo's "queen of fricasee chicken" has no favorite recipe. The single Bates has one culinary rule in her kitchen: keep things simple.



Bloom County comic strip by Berke Breathed

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