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# Willard Levy

## Angelica Corporation

By M. Karen Hubbard

Angelica Corporation was founded in St. Louis in 1878 when a chef named Cherubino Angelica created a coat and hat to be worn by chefs. Being a chef himself, Angelica knew what features a good chef's coat should have. He and his wife designed a coat with two layers of cloth in front to protect the chef from heat and grease splatters. The cuffs on the sleeves were split on the sides so that the chef could use his cuffs as potholders. The hat looked like a tall, white mushroom, which to this day is identified as a chef's hat. Angelica wore the chef's uniform everyday and took orders from other chef's who wanted a uniform like his. He and his wife began producing other types of uniforms, such as those worn by waitresses, called Harvey Girls, in Fred Harvey Restaurants which were located in train stations all over the country.

Angelica died in 1897, and the business was run by Angelica family members for the next 25 years. In 1903, the business, with its six sewing machines, was purchased by Alfred J. Levy. Levy asked his brother, Mont, to help him, and the Levy brothers began running the Angelica Jacket Company. They began advertising uniforms to service workers in hotels, restaurants, food companies, and railroad waiters. They had many more customers, so they had to produce many more types of uniforms and by 1910, the company had 32 sewing machines. The brothers developed many new products, including a variety of apron styles for waitresses and white jackets for waiters.

They developed washable white uniforms for waiters. This was a very important new product because the mohair coats that waiters were wearing were not washable and, therefore, were not sanitary. After the success of their washable white uniforms, the Levy brothers introduced uniforms using colored fabrics. The company grew so large that it had to have warehouses in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. During World War II, Angelica Jacket was one of the largest makers of combat jackets for American troops. Angelica Jacket Company also designed uniforms especially for women who went to work in factories during the war.

In 1946, at the age of 32, Willard Levy became president and bought Alfred's share of the company. Although the company had been producing uniforms for hospital workers, under Willard's leadership, the company began to produce gowns for patients. As companies providing services grew, more uniforms were needed for their workers. Angelica Jacket Company changed its name to Angelica Uniform Company. The company created many new products and became the largest supplier of washable uniforms for hospital, restaurant, and hotel workers. In the mid-1960s, Willard recognized that more and more companies were having their workers buy their own uniforms, so Angelica started two new methods of selling: 1) the company started selling uniforms through catalogs in the mail and 2) the company opened its first retail store, Life Uniform Shop. Angelica Uniform Company became Angelica Corporation in 1967. Angelica began providing sheets and towels to hospitals and doing hospitals'

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laundry. The company even made some of the special clothing for the first astronauts on the moon!

The hospital uniform and linen business was greatly successful, but so were other areas of Angelica's business. Life Uniform Shops were expanding and grew to 140 stores in the 1980s. In addition to all of those stores, the company was the largest manufacturer of uniforms and rented the largest number of garments, such as hospital gowns, and textiles, such as sheets and towels to hospitals and other businesses.

Willard Levy added tremendous value to Angelica, from the time he became president in 1946 through his time as chief executive officer and chairman, until his retirement in 1984. He recognized that the growing health care industry would need uniforms for doctors, nurses, and technicians; patient gowns, sheets, and towels; and special protective clothing. He recognized that uniforms had to be washable. He saw the need for people to buy their own uniforms, so he started the Life Uniform Shops. He was a great entrepreneur, following in the footsteps of his father, his uncle, and Cherubino Angelica.