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Professional Produce throws 85th birthday bash for Milt Kaplan

By RAND GREEN

VERNON, CA — For a lot of people, 8 in the morning in the middle of the week might seem like an odd time to have an office birthday party. But by 8 a.m., Milt Kaplan, had already put in almost a full day's work alongside his much younger co-workers. Even at 85 he is on the job early every morning — typical of many produce marketers — not long after most people in other occupations with more normal hours have settled in for the night.

Mr. Kaplan, a buyer and salesman at Professional Produce here, is the son of Ted Kaplan, founder and president of Professional Produce. The company threw the birthday bash for him the morning of June 6, complete with balloons, a

mariachi band and (staying on message) birthday cakes beautifully decorated with fresh fruit.

Many of his friends in the produce industry showed up for the occasion.

According to Ted Kaplan, his father has spent his entire life in produce from about the age of nine or 10, with the exception of when he served in the United States Army during World War II.

"He is second generation" in the Los Angeles produce business, said Ted Kaplan, whose grandfather and grandmother started Kaplan's Fruit & Produce in downtown Los Angeles 1908. That company continued in business until 1982.

The family's involvement in produce actually goes back even further. Ted Kaplan said

that his grandfather's family came to Los Angeles from Jerusalem sometime around 1900 or earlier. Before that, "my dad's family — uncles, cousins and everything — were farming in Gadera, which is a small town outside Tel Aviv, and they had been doing that for over 100 years."

Ted Kaplan, who himself has been working in the produce business since about the age of 12, started Professional Produce in 1995 as a small company. Five years ago, Professional relocated to a new 48,000-square-foot warehouse, distribution and office facility here. The company is a diversified produce shipper, distributor and repacker and is also involved in the farming side of the business through partnerships with several growers.



Milt Kaplan on his 85th birthday with his son, Ted Kaplan.



A mariachi band at Milt Kaplan's 85th birthday party June 6.



Andrew Holzinger of Consolidated West Distributing Inc., Milt Kaplan, Joel Young of Consolidated West, and Mr. Kaplan's wife, Anita Kaplan.



Ted Kaplan (center) with Shelly Sylvester and Wayne Radford, both of Michael Cutler of California Inc. in Los Angeles.



Ted Kaplan with Jim Hinderer and Steven Cantor, both of Produce International LLC in Los Angeles.



Staying on message, two beautiful birthday cakes featured fresh fruit.



Friends and company personnel gather around Milt Kaplan and his wife, Anita Kaplan, to celebrate Mr. Kaplan's 85th birthday.