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## The Maker of Twinkies Is Fresh From Bankruptcy

By MICHAEL J. de la MERCED

They survived everything from the Great Depression to the Atkins Diet. And now Twinkies have even endured bankruptcy.

After more than four years, their maker, Interstate Bakeries, emerged from bankruptcy protection this week.

The private company, which also makes Wonder Bread, Hostess Ding Dongs and Drake's cakes, had at least one powerful fan rooting for it: Senator Charles E. Schumer of New York. Mr. Schumer personally appealed to a big lender to help Interstate through its troubles.

"Upstate New Yorkers can now have their Drake's cake and keep their jobs, too," Mr. Schumer said in a statement this week.

Created in 1930, with a banana cream filling, rather than the vanilla of today, Twinkies - - love 'em or hate 'em -- are about as emblematic as junk food gets. With 39 ingredients, 150 shamelessly empty calories and, officially, a shelf life of about three weeks, the Twinkie is a cream-filled symbol of American culture. Their mysterious longevity even earned them a joke in "Wall-E," Pixar's postapocalyptic robot love story.

Hostess Brands was acquired in 1995 by Interstate and today employs 22,000 people in 41 bakeries. But Interstate succumbed in September 2004 to various ailments, including the low-carb Atkins and South Beach Diets.

Burt P. Flickinger III of the Strategic Resource Group, a retail consulting firm, said Interstate faces stiff competition from rivals like Sara Lee. In light of the recession, even Hostess, the cream in Interstate's Twinkie, might have to lower prices, he said.

Craig D. Jung, Interstate's chief executive, said the company was working to adapt to tougher times and healthier snacking. It will expand its line of calorie-conscious snacks like Twinkie Bites, which have 100 calories a pack.

"At end of the day, consumers want to indulge," he said.

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