

On the Rise, Part 1

KRYSTAL GABERT, Editor, Food Manufacturing



Founded in 1886 by an Italian immigrant, Gonnella Baking Company can trace its roots back to a humble beginning on DeKoven Street in what is now Chicago's famed Loop neighborhood.

The company began as a one-man shop that Alessandro Gonnella operated on his own. After he returned from a trip to Italy with a new bride, also bakery-trained, the company doubled in size. After a couple of moves, first to the Sangamon Street in Chicago and later to Erie Street in 1915, the bakery began expanding into the large contract baker it is today. As soldiers returned from Europe after World War II, many suddenly demanded the high-quality bread to which they had grown accustomed. This new demand meant big growth for Gonnella.

Still family-owned, Gonnella Baking Company now employs the family's fourth generation. The company provides all major Chicago grocery chains with daily fresh bread deliveries, but the company's real bread and butter is its contract baking business.

After purchasing a frozen pizza facility from H. J. Heinz Company in 1983, Gonnella expanded its product line beyond baked bread. In addition to its fresh bakery lines, the company provides what many grocers call "proof and bake" frozen dough to supplement in-house grocery store bakeries. Now, processing frozen product for these and other applications takes up a full 70 percent of Gonnella's business.

The company currently employs 520 people, about 30 of whom are members of the

On the Rise, Part 1

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

original family. The company's Chicago Avenue and Aurora, Ill., facilities are responsible for the company's baked product lines, and the Schaumburg, Ill., facility and another location in Hazel Township, Penn., produce frozen product for Gonnella's contract manufacturing customers.

The Source of Innovation

Thomas Marcucci, Gonnella's Vice President of Sales and Marketing, says that the company's new product innovation "starts at the buying desk." This customer-driven approach means that when customers (or potential customers) approach Gonnella with a problem or request the company responds by analyzing its processes for a potential solution.

This approach is what led the company toward its British Retail Consortium (BRC) certification as well as various food safety protocol implemented across Gonnella Baking Company facilities. Marcucci sees these endeavors as part of an effort of continuous improvement necessary to protecting his clients' brands and "responding to the demands of the national marketplace."

It was, in fact, a customer inquiry that led Gonnella to bring its production processes in line with kosher standards at its Aurora facility.

Kosher Means Quality

Gonnella Baking Company's Aurora baking facility boasts over 60,000 square feet of production, wrapping and shipping space, and as of the fall of 2011, it also boasts kosher certification.



When approached by one of its contract manufacturing clients about kosher certification, Gonnella jumped at the chance to expand its business into this growing market. Daniel Herzog, the company's Vice President of Corporate Compliance and Food Safety, says that kosher certification was a natural fit for Gonnella.

"[Kosher food production] is about quality; it's about cleanliness. But more

On the Rise, Part 1

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

importantly for us, it is an important part of religious observance. We take that very seriously," he says.

For Gonnella, kosher certification affects not only the kosher products it produces but also every aspect of the production facility itself. Certain non-kosher ingredients are no longer allowed into the facility, and every ingredient purchased must be approved by a rabbinical board that oversees international kosher certifications.

Particular pans are designated for use in the kosher process, and all must be washed and stored according to kosher specifications.

The Gonnella team hopes that this certification will open new doors for their contract manufacturing business. "Now that we've gone through this process, we show other potential clients that we know how this is done, that we're doing it," says Marcucci.

Please tune into tomorrow's Chemical Equipment Daily for part two of this two-part series.

Source URL (retrieved on 12/19/2014 - 6:27pm):

<http://www.chem.info/articles/2012/08/rise-part-1>