

100 years in, DiCamillo Bakery still thriving



Continued from Page 1

who managed the store's first location on 14th Street alongside their 11 children. During those earliest days, the family delivered bread throughout the neighborhood via horse-drawn buggy.

The business eventually moved its production facility to the Linwood/Main Street area in 1976. Initially, the bakery only occupied the building at 811 Linwood. Now, the company owns another three adjacent buildings along the corridor, adding up to 36,000 square-feet.

In addition to its flagship location, the company also has retail locations in Lewiston and Williamsville, as well as two other locations in Niagara Falls.

Over the years, the company has managed to withstand a number of tumultuous events in American history; including depressions, recessions and, now, a global pandemic.

How?

"It takes an awful lot of luck," laughs Skip DiCamillo, who helps run the bakery. "It just has to all sort of work out. The stars have to align or something."

Beyond luck, a business also needs a quality product, something DiCamillo's has in spades. In addition to its delicious array of delightful desserts including cakes, doughnuts, eclairs, napoleons and its renowned authentic Italian biscotti, the bakery is perhaps best known for its acclaimed authentic scaletta bread. Or, as it's more commonly known throughout Western New York – DiCamillo's bread.

The bread seems to produce something of a magnetic attraction for people, bringing in current and even former residents every year. Skip says that, for many visiting natives, a loaf of DiCamillo's bread is a must-buy before they leave.

When asked why the bread is so well-loved, Skip's eyes light up and his voice grows more excited and passionate. His hands are enlivened with a generation's worth of bread-making muscle memory as he explains the century-old techniques the company still uses today.

"We still make the bread the same way, the formula hasn't changed since 1920. It's pretty authentic Italian bread in the way that most Italian bread isn't

any more. Even with the same ingredients – although most other Italian breads have some sort of shortening or milk in them – but they may just put the dough in the machine. It spits out these loaves, they go in pans, they go in the oven – they don't get touched by human hands.

"Our dough is hand-rolled. (We) take this dough and cut them into pieces, and these people (gesturing to the bakers) roll that piece of dough out to a string that's about this long (gestures with his hands) and then they snake it back like this and get it together, squeeze it, and get all the air out of it. That bread has texture. When you pull it apart it's fibrous, it's sinewy, you can see the texture of it. And then it just has a great crust. So, it is bread that you can't get in many places because it is handmade. ...

"When people come back (to Western New York,) they get Weber's mustard, they get Margherita pepperoni, they get all these things that they can't get anywhere else. Western New York is rich in food culture and we're very fortunate. I think that that's part of what brings people back is the authenticity and the quality and nostalgia. ... It goes back to your youth, 'I remember having DiCamillo's toast,' you know?"

But it's not just customers who are drawn back to the bakery. Throughout its centennial run, the business, which has remained under the sole ownership and management of the DiCamillo family, has seen members leave and return to the business at various points in time to pursue other interests. Skip himself lived in California for some years after college. His brother, David, left at one point to work for an oil company. Another brother, Michael,

at one point worked in New York. Even his son's, Matt and Daniel, pursued careers in education.

"We all left at some point. And then we all wandered back to the bakery," Skip says.

Today, second, third, and now, even fourth generation members of the family work to keep the tradition alive.

"A good family business is really tremendous," Skip says. "It's always been nice to have your family around. Working with your family, you got to see them all the time, so you didn't say 'Well, jeez, I haven't seen my mother in a week; I haven't seen my father in a month.' You see your family. It can be rough sometimes (laughs), but we've been very fortunate."

Photos of all generations of DiCamillo family members are featured predominantly in a large mural, another new feature of the Linwood location. The mural also features many current and former employees. Skip says the family wanted to immortalize the workers whom he said were "instrumental in getting us to a hundred years."

"We've been lucky to have some really good people that made it all enjoyable. And we wanted to acknowledge them," Skip says.

As much as the Linwood renovations are a celebration of the company's past, Skip says it also serves as a way to prepare for the future. DiCamillo's has stood as one of the few thriving businesses left in an area that is known for blight. Now, with the city's overall revitalization efforts along Main Street, Linwood Avenue seems primed to be one of the busiest thoroughfares to the revamped downtown area. With a newly renovated store, DiCamillo's hopes to remain a community staple for

a whole new generation.

"This is a good first step for the north end, and for us to pay the community back, in a way." Skip says. "This area has been very good to us. A lot of our employees live in the area, our customers. ... It's been, you know, a hundred years that they've been supporting us. I know the rest of Main Street hasn't survived so well, but you know, we've been doing business here for almost 50 years at this location; we just figured we're just going to keep doing it.

"It's coincidental that two of my kids are in the business now; that there's a fourth generation going forward; and, you know, a good flagship store is always an asset – especially if you don't know what's coming in the future. So, it made a lot of sense for us to do this and we wanted to do it. (It's) sort of like turning things over to

the next generation."

What will the next century hold for the bakery?

"We're hoping, as the old saying goes, the first hundred years are the hardest (laughs)," Skip says.

City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino visited DiCamillo's on Thursday morning.

"DiCamillo Bakery is a staple within the Niagara Falls community," he says. "They are a model example of what can be accomplished with hard work as a small business in Niagara Falls. As a community, we're proud to have been a part of their beginning and supportive of the DiCamillo family's business.

"For their 100-year anniversary, we should be celebrating it right with fireworks and more, but instead with the limitations of COVID-19, we're doing it bit by bit and enjoying it all as we go."



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