

*Food in Canada started the Top Ten on the occasion of our 60th anniversary issue. We wanted to highlight new food and beverage entrepreneurs who with drive and a great idea are ready to get into the marketplace. Each year we find budding companies across the country who have invested the necessary blood, sweat and tears to bring their great ideas to fruition. Here are their stories.*

\* \* \*

## HEARTY & HEALTHY

BY DAVID KOSUB

The decision made back in 1990 was a radical one, admits Mark Tsemak. Tempered by hard-headed engineering courses from BCIT and UBC the 30-year old Russian immigrant originally envisioned a career building massive townhouse complexes, not overseeing the movement of cookie dough along assembly line conveyor belts. Trouble was Tsemak's father continued to labour as a truck driver, his mother as a cashier in a retail store. He wanted something better for him and for them.

"I thought the food business was the best way to get my parents involved, because they enjoyed cooking at home. So we just went around the local stores. There was Ukrainian food, Greek food, Italian, you name it, but we saw no authentic Russian foods."

Switching careers was not the only radical departure the president of Burnaby-based Perestroika Products Ltd. and Red Square Bakery would propose in those early days. Tsemak knew people would love the rich taste of Russian bread, blintzes, *piroshkis* and *varenikis* (fully baked stuffed rolls similar to the Ukrainian *pirogi*), but he also knew a more recent trend in natural, healthful foods could undercut his new



*Perestroika's line of fat-free preservative-free products are carried in every major supermarket in the Lower Mainland, B.C.*

business. The challenge, he says, was to assure people about the nutritional value of traditional Russian food, while capturing the smells of the baked goods he remembered from his childhood in Russia.

Before long, father, mother and son pooled their resources, rented a small 800 square foot manufacturing space

in North Vancouver and imported an automated patty machine directly from Russia. The *piroshki* machine could do something neither he nor his parents could do working full out – stuff enough extruded dough with savoury filling to produce 850 baked *piroshkis* in an hour. Tsemak replaced the machine's fat fryer with heating

elements, and for the next three months he and his parents experimented with different batters and flours.

"I decided my customers would not eat anything that's been bleached, changed, modified or had preservatives," says Tsemak. "We must have tried about 15 different flours. We added some sugar, salt and some yeast and ended up with a great product."

Dressed in a freshly pressed suit, he made his way to Costco's buyer's department, where he unwrapped his food samples. "Genuine *piroshkis*," he told the company's buyer. "Taste. Tell me what you think."

The folks at Costco loved it. "And that's how we started running the business and started making money. After that, we never looked back."

Perestroika's line of fat-free preservative-free products are carried in every major supermarket in the Lower Mainland. Sales have grown ten-fold (nearly \$2 million in 2003). A 4,000 square foot facility in Burnaby has replaced the original premises. From the beginning, says Tsemak, his focus has remained on delivering a line of tasty, nutritional baked products, using ingredients geared to good health.

"I don't use any preservatives and in my batters I use a lot of ground flax, which contains lignans, soluble fibre, insoluble fibre, protein and omega-3 essential fatty acids, all good for your health. If my dumplings are filled with meat, it has to be lean meat."

His own kielbasa double smoked sausage is made without nitrates. Instead, he wraps his *piroshki* and *vareniki* pastry shells around preservative-free beef, pork and skinless chicken breast meat. His fillings range from natural baby sized potatoes, mashed in the traditional way, with a little milk and onion, to Canadian shredded medium cheddar cheese melted into a freshly prepared hot mash. These ingredients, says Tsemak, lend a rich creamy flavour to traditional Russian food that consumers increasingly are coming to prefer over the competition's products.

"We don't tend to overheat ingredients and we don't like accelerated production. We don't want to force the product to do what it's not supposed to

do. I'd rather bake at lower temperatures and take more time because I want the batter to be big, taste good and I don't want any raw dough taste."

By slowing the baking time, by baking in two-pound instead of one-pound units you avoid that inflated tire look that so many conventional breads have, adds Tsemak. And you produce a one-pound loaf of bread that tastes the way bread should taste.

"The texture has to have a nice crust, a nice density throughout the batter and it should not absorb spreads. That density sustains everything on top instead of being saturated throughout the bread. And it gives you protein, so every bite is so much tastier and better for you."

*David Kosub is a Victoria, B.C.-based freelance writer.*



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# HERDING UP SAUCE LOVERS

BY JEAN SORENSEN

Joe Ternes knew he had a winner when the phone calls to his Calgary meat shop came in from clients all over Canada and the U.S. asking for his specialty barbecue sauce. Customers wanted it shipped by the case. "But the freight is going to cost more than the sauce," he would tell customers who had tracked down his outlet. Clients didn't care; shipments went out. Those days were the early roots of Cattle Boyz, a sauce that is still winning over barbecue connoisseurs. A 2002/2003 ACNielsen report ranked Cattle Boyz Original sauce fourth for sales in litre tonnage out of 115 brands sold in Western Canada. The rating is high praise for a fairly new product competing in the same ring with megabrands such as Heinz and Kraft.

The original Cattle Boyz sauce had a taste-test kitchen as big as the Alberta prairie. The Ternes family had raised prime Alberta beef for over 70 years. On the grain and cattle farm, barbecues at harvest time were a convenient way of feeding crews. Ternes remembers his mother and grandmother creating the family's favourite sauce in the kitchen. It was mainly a rib marinade with a full-bodied taste too strong for the average consumer. So, in the mid-1990s when Ternes offered the product to the general public from his Eau Claire Market meat shop, it had been modified. It could now be used as a glaze, marinade, barbecue sauce, stir-fry sauce, plus it could be added to beans and chili. Molasses gave it a sweet taste and brown colour, while spices and other ingredients made it piquant. At that time, it was produced



Joe Ternes and Karen Hope of Cattle Boyz Foods Ltd.

and bottled out of Joe Ternes' own kitchen.

It took the skill of a savvy marketer, such as Karen Hope, to jump the product onto store shelves. Hope had worked as marketing director for Eau Claire Market, promoting its retail stores, including the meat shop selling Cattle Boyz BBQ sauce. Hope would take the sauce home to her own family and friends and even use it as a hostess gift instead of wine. Everyone would ask where they could buy more.

Competition from other stores in the mall eventually closed the meat shop and Hope went on to form her own marketing and advertising company – The Marketing Edge – in 1995. But she had not forgotten how popular the barbecue sauce was. After a few years of helping other businesses market their products and services, Hope wanted to market something she could call her own.

She saw her first opportunity when the TSC Shopping Channel ran a con-

test for Alberta food products. She went back to Ternes and suggested they enter the Cattle Boyz barbecue sauce. It was a bold step. "I had no experience in the food industry," she says. But she did have ideas.

Cattle Boyz's Original BBQ sauce won over the judges. "I dressed up in western gear and flogged the sauce on TV," she recalls. Orders came in from across Canada. Shortly after their brief 15 minutes of fame, *Profit Magazine* wrote about the BBQ sauce and its success on TSC.

Not one to aim low, Hope took her newly found success to Costco and scored a major hit in 1998. The warehouse club retailer became the first major Canadian account. In the first year, 50,000 bottles of Cattle Boyz were sold in Western Canada.

Other major accounts followed. "A year later, stores and brokers who at one time would not return my calls, were now calling me," she says. The demand for Cattle Boyz had begun.

It was also at that time that Hope and Ternes realized the sauce was a stampeding success and they needed to form a new partnership. Cattle Boyz Foods Ltd. emerged with Ternes and Hope as partners and Hope acting as managing partner.

Hope and Ternes have since set about expanding the line. "We introduced a second flavour, Cattle Boyz Honey Hot Barbecue Sauce," says Hope. It has all the versatility of the original sauce but has more chili for kick and honey for sweetness. Neither product uses MSG or glutins.

Currently the Honey Hot sauce is sold only in Western Canada. Also added to the line of barbecue gourmet products are sprinkle-on seasoning blends – one called Cattle Boyz Gourmet Seasoning and a second called Pepper Blend (black pepper mixed with red and bell peppers). They complement the sauces, can be used on meats or in salads and are sold through specialty barbecue stores.


While Hope and Ternes have marveled at their success in the marketplace, they are intent on keeping their branding irons hot. Hope says she wants to leave the brand on the store

shelf year-round as some stores only stock the product during the summer barbecue months. She believes that once the versatility of both products becomes more apparent, stores will see it as a better year-round shelf choice than conventional brands.


She's also keeping an eye on the American market. Currently, Hope has been steadily building a roster of small U.S. specialty shops stocking the

sauces. "We are going to be participating in the New York Fancy Food Show this year," she says. Once the roster of U.S. buyers is grown further, Hope is convinced a U.S. broker will ride up and want to wrangle a major deal, making the sauce as popular in regions of the U.S. as it has become in Canada.


*Jean Sorensen is a Victoria, B.C.-based freelance writer.*



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# GOING GREEN

Yves Potvin Launches New Meat Alternative

By JEAN SORENSEN

**F**ormer chef Yves Potvin makes it quite clear that he has nothing against meat as he launches his second company Garden Protein International, which produces a meat-substitute called 'Gardein' from vegetable proteins.

But with growing consumer concerns today regarding meat, he says "the timing is right" to debut his new line of vegetable-based protein products. These chicken, pork and beef flavoured products can be used in soups, stir-fries, curries or combined with sauces. The new product is already being distributed through SYSCO Foods to commercial outlets and institutions in Canada and the U.S. By fall, Potvin expects to see one or more



Yves Potvin

North American manufacturers package Gardein to sell through retail stores. Discussions are currently on with many of the largest Canadian and

U.S. company labels.

Younger and more health-conscious consumers are seeking out meat alternatives as a life-style decision. Aging baby-boomers are looking for healthy protein choices without the fat and cholesterol.

Potvin says he envisions restaurants using the product on their menus as an alternative. "You might have a dish with meat and a second with chicken and a third alternative as Gardein," he says. (Several restaurants and food service outlets – including the University of British Columbia – are consumer testing the product.)

Potvin is best known for Yves Veggie Cuisine – a line of processed veggie items, such as luncheon slices, ham-

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burger patties and hot-dogs that he built into a \$50 million enterprise. In 2001, he sold the company to Celestial Foods Group, a U.S. company whose own line of health foods fit well with his products.

"I decided to take a year off and spend time with my kids," says Potvin. But he had wanted to start a company that produced plant protein-derived product that had the taste and texture

of meat. He also wanted to sell to restaurants, institutions and companies that could supply retail outlets either with packages of his product or as an ingredient in frozen entrées.

So, just over a year ago, he hired a team and launched his second venture into the market of meat alternatives. "I say the other [company] was a teenager, which I let go, and this is my new baby," says Potvin. Potvin's process uses

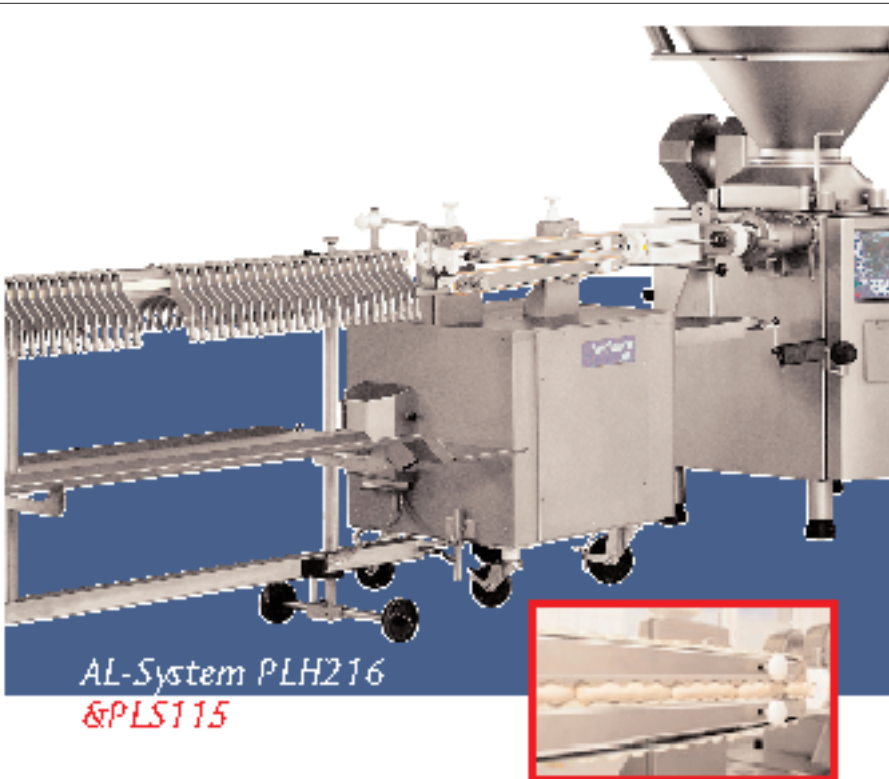
carrot fibres with soy and wheat to make a product that looks like muscle meat when cut into pieces. It behaves similar to meat when cooked and it takes on the flavours of seasoning and sauces well.

The question that he gets asked often is why bother to try to recreate the look, taste and feel of meat? The answer is easy for Potvin, who is a flexitarian – someone in today's society who moves between non-meat and meat dishes. They are used to meat as a building block of the meal. It's also the reason he created the veggie hot-dog in his old company. "I grew up liking hot-dogs," he says. But he realized that the materials used in their production did not make wieners the healthiest choice. He didn't want to give up the experience of biting into a self-dressed, hot-dog bought from an outdoor vendor heavy with the aroma of pan-fried onions wafting about. The veggie dog offered a health-conscious solution.

Gardein is also a pioneer of downstream changes that Canada will likely see in the future in terms of food production. "Meat right now is very cheap in North America compared to Europe," he says. However, there will be more pressure on land bases as the world doubles its population in the next 45 years. Currently, Canadian meat producers are grappling with large scale operations as a means of keeping meat prices low, however, these same farmers have seen disease outbreaks spread swiftly amongst populations and large numbers of herds and flocks destroyed. Production methods may have to be altered to prevent the rapid spread of animal diseases and the reduced economies of scale will push up meat prices. "Right now the price of Gardein is about the same as meat," he says. But, in the future, Gardein can serve as a way of placing low-cost protein onto a family's table as plant-based proteins gain greater recognition amongst consumers.

"I look at it as my small contribution to the industry," he says, calling himself "a chickenless chicken farmer."

*Jean Sorensen is a Victoria B.C.-based freelance writer.*



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# BANKING ON BANNOCK

BY JACK KOHANE

**B**anding together to form a company called Earth & Sky Cuisine Inc., 11 Saskatchewan First Nations are banking on bannock (a traditional native North American flatbread) for rising prosperity. Operated by the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, Earth & Sky hopes to eventually utilize 400,000 acres of underdeveloped treaty farmland in the Qu'Appelle Valley north of Regina to supply all the ingredients used in production.

Project manager Kevin Durst believes the Council has a hit on its hands with the recent product launch of two forms of bannock: frozen rounds (ready to eat when thawed or toasted) and a bulk dry mix for institutional foodservice accounts. A dry-mix 300 gram cylinder form will soon be available to consumers.

Both the mix and the package of six frozen rounds (70 grams/round, which retail for about \$4.99) are available in two different flavours: cranberry-sage and wild blueberry thyme. Sold under the Omega Bannock brand to accentuate the product's organic flax flour ingredient (using a new shelf-stable, unbleached and unbromated flour developed in Saskatoon), the mix is 100 per cent certified organic and the frozen rounds are 76 per cent certified organic.

Earth & Sky's commercial form of organic bannock began in 2002 at the Food Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, where the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council had the prototype developed. Durst, a food marketer, was hired to focus on developing the Western Canadian and American markets.



Presently, the fledgling company sources its flax from recognized organic producers, then ships it to co-packer Bonté Foods in Dieppe, N.B. There it's processed into bannock, packaged and forwarded frozen to Ontario Natural Food Co-op, an Etobicoke, Ont.-based federation of retail food co-operatives, which then distributes Omega Bannock to 600 member stores (primarily specialty foods outlets) across Eastern Canada. In addition, the organic retail giant Whole Foods is currently test-marketing the bannock in its Toronto location.

"Our ultimate goal is to produce all raw ingredients and products on First Nations Lands, where commitment to and involvement in environmentally friendly farming and sustainable agriculture will help improve the lives of First Nations people consistent with the First Nations philosophy," emphasizes Durst. "Our strategy is to transition a percentage of the land owned by the bands into organic production. As more revenue is generated, we'll construct a plant and continue to add value to the product line."

Bannock is just the first in a series of branded Earth & Sky products for the company, notes Durst. "We're in dis-

cussions with other First Nations producers with a view to bringing complementary lines to bannock, including smoked Arctic char and jams."

Marketing primarily through industry trade shows, Earth & Sky was introduced at BioFach in Nurnberg, Germany last year, then presented at the Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, Calif., in March, and at SIAL Montreal in April 2003. "Buyers liked the fact that our bannock recipe, passed down through the centuries by the Tribal Elders, contains no trans fats, is made with all-vegetable, non-hydrogenated shortening and pure toasted flax meal – a natural source of fibre and omega-3, an essential fatty acid," says Durst.

Earth & Sky highlights bannock's versatility: as a healthy snack alternative, as a light meal spread with butter or preserves, served alongside soups and dips or as an hors d'oeuvre topped with cheese, smoked fish and meats.

"It's a compelling product," says Durst. "And we're having fun watching this enterprise come to life."

*Jack Kohane is a Toronto-based freelance writer and regular contributor to Food in Canada.*

# INTO THE SAUCE

BY MIKE ENGLAND

At an age when most of their contemporaries are taking life easy, Rhysia and Brian Smith are into the sauce. Their business venture “was a fluke – something completely out of the blue,” says Rhysia, who was close to retiring from nursing and was wondering what she was going to do with her time. Her son Andrew, who was close to completing a business degree, offered a solution: “Why don’t you put that garlic in a bottle, mum, and sell it?”

Before Rhysia had time to get her head around that idea, Andrew was offering to draw up a sales and marketing plan, which would be submitted as a course project. After some discussion it was decided that the Smiths would use their neighbours as guinea pigs to test their gourmet sauce. And that’s how Embers Products Inc. was born.

Rhysia, who had always enjoyed cooking, produced four different samples of garlic sauce and the favourite was selected for marketing. Her foray into the business world proved daunting as there was nothing familiar to draw upon. “I didn’t know a debit from a credit, or a marketing plan from anything when I started,” she says.

Help, fortunately, was not far away. Working closely with Carol Crouse, a food technologist consultant, they developed a number of product lines, which helped them create a niche in the high-end specialty sauce market. Their proudest achievement was winning 1<sup>st</sup> place at the Toronto Fine Food Show for their wild blueberry piquante sauce.

All of the manufacturing is carried out on the first floor of the home they built when they moved to Kinkora, P.E.I. No employees were hired and none are needed, says Rhysia. “We work well together and have complete control over everything. We control the quality, the process...how the products are looked after...the cleanliness of the facility.” Half the products are turned out under their own business name Embers. The remainder is private-labeled for several Island companies.

Although Rhysia tends to work with intuition and gut feelings she characterizes their joint approach to business as cautious. “I’m the one who has the ideas, but Brian pulls the rope and keeps me in check. He’s the leveler – the man who looks after the cash flow and tells me when I can go ahead with another product.”

Their workday begins at 7:30 a.m. and lasts as long as necessary. When large orders have to be filled they put in 16-hour days. On Saturdays Brian heads to the Farmer’s Market



Rhysia and Brian Smith

in Charlottetown and sets up the stall he has been running for the past five years. He recently asked one of his customers, who always buys chocolate sauce, how she uses the product. “I’m stirring it into my yogurt. That way I don’t feel so guilty,” she replied.

Word of the Embers product line seems to have reached exalted levels. The Smiths now count Prince Edward and his wife Sophie among their customers. “They were flying home and their caterers called and said they’d like to use our mustard sauce. We weren’t allowed to say anything to anybody until the plane had taken off,” says Brian.

Looking back on the way the business developed, Brian says that it would have been nice to jump to year five straight away. “Seriously though...there are no short cuts. You have to go through an apprenticeship.”

Having more time to watch golf does sound attractive, says Brian, but he is not yet ready for a couch potato existence. “As long as we’re healthy and our minds are alert, we’ll push on with the business. If we’re happy doing that, why should we finish?”

*Mike England is a Prince Edward Island-based freelance writer.*

# CONFECTION HEAVEN

Upscale chocolate a decadent delight • BY JACK KOHANE

**A**nna Janes came by churning out her chocolate crunch quite by accident. “The business found me, I didn’t find the business,” says the founder of CocoMira Confections Inc. in Toronto. For years, she created delectable desserts for friends and family, and everyone oohed and aahed over the creamy results. “The idea about building a business around these recipes didn’t dawn on me until a friend involved in the food business said, ‘You can do something with these chocolates.’”

When she took her hazelnut crunch concoction to a Toronto food event in 2002, hundreds of people sampled her homemade fusion of caramel, chocolate and nuts and asked where they could purchase it. “There and then, an opportunity was born that I couldn’t resist,” smiles Janes.

As a former magazine art director in Canada and the U.S., who also started another business as a graphic/web designer, Janes recognized that she was happiest when making something. “I love pure milk chocolate, so investing in the equipment to produce my hazelnut crunch in large volumes wasn’t a big leap of faith. It’s something I enjoy doing.”

Essentially the only machinery needed are an industrial kettle that stirs melting sugar into caramel at a consistent rate and temperature, a cooling table to carve up the gelling caramel blocks and a chocolate enrobing (coating) unit where the ingredients are merged.

“In its simplest form, making caramel is simply heating sugar until it carbonizes (burns),” explains Janes. “The trick is to remove it just as it starts to burn.” What she does that’s different from many other caramel-based confections is blend in a higher proportion of butter with the sugar, which, she notes, changes the process. “The sugar can now rise to a much higher temperature than it can just on its own. There’s a big difference in taste profile between caramel made only from sugar (or just sugar and water) and ‘buttery’ caramel.”

Made of natural ingredients with no trans fatty acids, no hydrogenated oils and no additives, Janes is marketing Hazelnut Crunch as a gourmet chocolate product for consumers over 40. “My product is also gluten-free, a strong selling point in a health-conscious market such as Whole Foods Market and to the estimated one in 200 Canadians who cannot digest wheat flour,” she says.

Primarily targeting gourmet food retailers, Janes and her Canadian distributor, Incasa Fine Foods, have been working to sell into retailers such as Second Cup and gift basket com-



Anna Janes

panies. In the Toronto area, she’s on the shelves of high-end food retailers, such as Pusateri’s, Sanelli’s (in Etobicoke) and Denninger’s (Hamilton), and has begun selling to national retailers, including Caban (with seven outlets) and Chapters/Indigo. “A food manufacturer can’t ignore the U.S., and we’re aggressively developing markets there, too,” she states.

Thus far, CocoMira Confections ([www.cocomira.com](http://www.cocomira.com)) is focusing on its Hazelnut Crunch brand to smooth the path to other line extensions (perhaps a caramel crunch with pecans later this year). The company’s premium 175 gram gift box retails for between \$7.99 and \$9.99. A new, smaller 35 gram impulse sales-driven size retails for between \$1.69 and \$1.99, positioned at the pastry bar beside the tarts and cookies of upscale snack and coffee shops. Also under development is a 35 gram snack variety packaged like a chocolate bar for sale at cash register counters in supermarkets and drug stores.

“I always lead with my product when meeting with customers and retail buyers,” emphasizes Janes, adding that once they try her crunchy creation, they’re swooning for more.

*Jack Kohane is a Toronto-based freelance writer and regular contributor to Food in Canada.*

Photo: Michael Kohn

# SAY CHEESE

BY SANDRA EAGLE

In rather a roundabout way, Margaret Morris discovered her true calling. She had worked for a number of years in the food industry as an importer and exporter of ingredients. Her last employer was an importer of fine cheese in Montreal where she developed a taste for well-aged and raw milk cheeses.

So she decided to try her hand as an artisanal cheesemaker. As Morris grew up on a dairy farm in southern Ontario, she knew she would always have access to a ready supply of milk. It was difficult to find supplies, and the actual ingredients and the recipe support for making cheese was virtually unknown, says Morris. So in 1995 Glengarry Cheesemaking and Dairy Supply based in Alexandria, Ont., was created to cater to the artisanal cheesemaker in Canada and the U.S.

Morris did a lot of research and found mentors in Canada, Holland and France to teach her the craft and began to produce cheese in small batches with different types of cow's milk. "Some of my friends had Jersey and Ayrshire cows and I worked that milk into the same recipes and I found that different recipes responded differently to the type of milk I was using."

Meanwhile, Morris developed a catalogue of supplies, produced a DVD on cheesemaking and wrote a book called *The Cheesemaker's Manual*. She continued to develop her own recipes for cheese and is now getting ready to make the leap to commercial production.

Morris applied for and received a milk quota under an innovation program to make seven types of cheese. She also has plans to build a two-story 3,000-square-foot facility in Alexandria, Ont., conveniently located just an hour away from Ottawa and Montreal.

Morris wanted to imbue her products with the history of the region she lives in and honour the ancestral heritage of herself and her three employees. Many of the original settlers in the region were Scottish Empire Loyalists. Many of them made cheddar, and her Glengarry Fen is a cross between a Cheddar and a Caerphilly (a Welsh origin crumbly cheese). The Fen weighs 3.5 kilograms and will be coated in green wax to ripen. Her *Boerderijkass*, based on the Dutch heritage of one of her employees, will taste "like Edam, Gouda and Harvarti all at once," laughs Morris, and will be shaped like



Artisanal cheeses from  
Glengarry Cheesemaking  
Dairy & Supply

a loaf and also ripened in clear wax. St. Raphaël is the last of her hard cheeses and is named after the first Catholic Church erected in her region by Scottish Loyalists.

Her semi-firm variety is called *Fleur de Lait* and is hand washed with salt water and organisms to condition the rind. "This is our most aromatic cheese, the rind has a beautiful smell and the inside is delicate and floral." Also slated for production are Celtic Blue with a limestonelike rind and the Alexandran, a Reblochon type of cheese. She will also offer a fresh cheese, called Figaro, to be sold three weeks after it's made. Morris cautions that it's quite strong, and reminds most people of a good Crottin.

Morris plans to take a refresher course in France at the end of the year to nail down the affinage (ripening technique) for the St. Raphaël cheese. "It really is an art that has to be learned, and very few people have a natural talent for cheesemaking," says Morris. Luckily she has studied with some of the best European masters of the trade. Morris' first cheeses should be ready by Christmas in 2005. "I've taught a lot of chefs from Toronto in our cheesemaking courses, so there is already a demand when the first cheeses are ready," adds Morris.

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# A SLICE OF THE NORTH

Native delicacies find an international market • BY HÉLÈNA KATZ

Canada's newest territory is bringing foods from North of 60 to the world while creating local employment. Kivalliq Arctic Foods Limited in Rankin Inlet processes caribou meat and wild Arctic char from Nunavut. A subsidiary of the Nunavut Development Corporation, it was incorporated in 1992 and all of the company's products are cut and processed by Inuit. Last year the company's 12 to 15 employees processed 257,000 pounds of caribou meat and 24,000 pounds of Arctic char. Sales topped \$1.4 million in 2003 and \$1.2 million the year before.

Inuit fishermen catch Arctic char, a freshwater fish, in summer. It's kept at a satellite plant and processed by Kivalliq Arctic Foods from November through January. Then the processing plant switches gears and processes caribou from the end of February until November.

The caribou harvest takes place in February and March and the meat is held in cold storage to be processed over a period of seven or eight months. The plant, about 2,800 square feet not including freezers and coolers, is working at 85 per cent capacity.

The amount of meat that Kivalliq Arctic Foods can process is limited by the supply of caribou. Production depends on the harvest, says general manager Brian Schindel. "With caribou we have a limited supply since its wild and we have a quota where only a certain number of animals can be harvested."

The company was certified by the European Union in 1999. "We had to make few improvements because when we built the plant, it was built to really good standards," says Schindel. The requirement that every employee have a health certificate signed by a doctor proved to be a bit of a challenge. Since Rankin Inlet didn't have a doctor stationed there full time, the company had to make appointments whenever doctors flew into the remote community.

The remoteness also presents transportation challenges in a territory where communities are not linked by road. "Small supplies are flown up, and heavy stuff is barged up in August," explains Schindel. A supply of cardboard cartons is ordered each May for delivery by barge in August and stored for the year. "You don't want to be flying them up in wintertime because of the cost of freight."

Since Rankin Inlet is the hub of the Kivalliq region of



Nunavut, 737 jets land frequently. Planes often bring up supplies from the south but return empty and Kivalliq Arctic Foods can take advantage of this to send freight down to Edmonton or Winnipeg on back haul rates. That is, so long as Mother Nature is willing. "You might have a two or three day blizzard where you can't get your product moving," says Schindel. "You generally can get your product out, but it seems that when you really need to get it out, you've got a storm." The company sometimes places some of its products in cold storage in the south and uses the facilities as secondary distribution points when weather prevents shipping directly from the plant.

Kivalliq Arctic Foods has distributors in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, Colorado, California and Nevada. It has also begun selling "Karibo from Kanada" in Germany. "We've chosen not to sell direct because of our remoteness. It's difficult to give the attention to restaurants or single users," says Schindel. On a practical level it also makes it easier for collections. "Because we are remote, we can't actually go do a physical visit to someone who owes us money."

The general manager credits employees, many of whom have been with the company for nine or 10 years, for the company's achievements. "Our employees know what they've got to do and how to get it done," Schindel says. "That's been the key to our success."

*Hélène Katz is a Montreal-based freelance writer.*

# HEY BABY

Mother Hen frozen purees offer convenience and a healthy choice • BY HÉLÈNA KATZ

**N**ecessity is more than the mother of invention. It also spawned Mother Hen Baby Food Inc. A mother and daughter created the Montreal company in 1994 to make home-style frozen baby food that is free of preservatives, salt and starch.

Five years later, Christophe Di Giovanni and his father bought the small firm, the only Canadian manufacturer specializing in frozen baby food. It has grown by leaps and bounds ever since. Production shot up from 5,000 containers of baby food a week to 250,000. “We double or triple our growth each year,” says company president Di Giovanni.

Mother Hen produces 36 fruit and vegetable purees, as well as single meat purees and textured junior meals. Mother Hen products are packaged in ready-to-serve individual frozen portions and sold in boxes of either four or six servings.

Two products, Mother Hen’s mango puree and chicken cacciatore, were recently finalists for the Canadian New Product Grand Prix. The event is organized by the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors and winners will be announced on May 30, 2004.

The company, which has 30 to 40 employees, moved into an 18,000 square-foot-plant about a year ago. “It’s already too small,” admits Di Giovanni. Production runs 24 hours a day and he’s looking for new machines to increase productivity.

Fresh produce is boiled and then pureed with the water in which it is cooked. It’s strained and put into pots at 70° C and then frozen at -35° C. After an hour and a half, the frozen puree is ready to be packaged. Containers are 59 ml for purees and 118 ml for meals for juniors.

Di Giovanni says that his company’s products latch onto a trend toward healthier eating. “Women are waiting longer to have babies because of their careers and want homemade food for them but can’t do it. So they buy Mother Hen and don’t feel guilty about what they’re feeding their baby,” he says. “We make it like you would make it at home, except that it’s more sterile than at home. It tastes like it’s homemade.”

Mother Hen products are available at 1,000 points of sale and customers can find them in Pharmacie Jean-Coutu outlets, Metro, Loblaws, Maxi and IGA grocers. Initially getting the company’s 36 products into the freezers of Quebec stores proved to be a challenge because the chains



Christophe Di Giovanni

weren’t convinced that the baby food would sell. Then business took off. “Once it started working, they started referring us to others,” Di Giovanni says.

He admits that selling baby food in a province known for its low birth rate has propelled the company to look for new markets. “Babies eat (our product) from three months to 18 months. After that, we lose our customers.”

The company’s in-house sales team works in Quebec, while Mother Hen has an agent in the United States and brokers for the rest of Canada. “We are quietly opening up our markets,” says Di Giovanni. It has points of sale in Vancouver and entered the markets in Ontario and the U.S. in January 2004. The reaction from the American market has been excellent. “They practically greeted us with open arms,” says Di Giovanni. “We did some trade shows there and they told us it was something they were waiting for.”

Right now, Mother Hen employees are waiting to find out if they will be the winners of the Canadian New Product Grand Prix. Di Giovanni admits that winning the award would be a plus, but being a finalist has already generated new clients. “There are already people who have called us because we’re finalists for the Grand Prix.” The father and son operation is a winner already.

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# SLAKING A THIRST

Small Newfoundland brewery an East coast icon • BY HÉLÈNA KATZ

**T**he small green building at the end of Quidi Vidi Lake blends into the scenery in this historic fishing village on the edge of St. John's, Nfld. A small sign at the entrance lets visitors know that the former fish processing plant is now home to the Quidi Vidi Brewing Company Limited. "It had only two doors and no windows," recalls president David Rees of the time he first laid eyes on the building. "It was a pretty dull looking piece of property."

He and business partner David Fong bought the building in 1995, started renovations and set up shop in 1996. The largest microbrewery east of Quebec, production at their 10,000 square-foot-plant was 50,000 dozen beers initially and has now doubled its output.

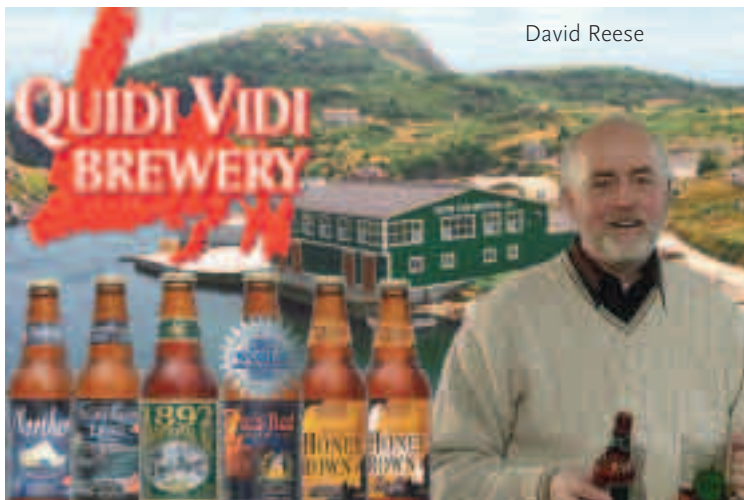
Rees, an electrical engineer, admits that he knew little about brewing. "All I knew was how to drink beer," he quips. They lured a former general manager of Labatt's in Newfoundland out of retirement to help them set up their company. Their brew master has 33 years experience and a degree in chemistry. "We were very lucky to find these individuals," he says. "These guys had a wealth of experience and were able to help us get premium quality products on the market right from the get go."

Their main brands are 1892 Traditional Ale (a European-style beer named for the last great fire that burned St. John's to the ground), Northern Light, Honey Brown, Honey Brown Light and Northern Lager. Eric's Red Cream Ale won a silver medal at the World Beer Championships in 2001 held by the Beverage Testing Institute in Chicago.

Newfoundlanders are big beer drinkers. The island's population of about half a million people consumes 10 million dozen beers between them each year. "I thought they were joking," says Rees when he first heard the figure. Northern Light, Honey Brown and 1892 Traditional Ale are the company's biggest sellers, accounting for 75 per cent of its sales.

The products are available in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario. Rees says 90 per cent of their sales are local while the rest are specialty and out-of-province exports. The plant is operating at one-third of its capacity and has 16 full- and part-time employees.

"We couldn't get our beer into licensees without a fight because people were saying, 'How can we sell it if nobody is asking for it?'" says Rees. But demand has grown and so has the percentage of sales to bars and restaurants, from 10 to 25 per cent. Rees expects that to increase to 30 per cent. The rest



David Rees

are for the take-home trade.

They promote their products through tastings, point of sale material and advertisements. "Our whole marketing strategy is to use the map of Newfoundland as an icon for the brewery," says Rees. The image of the map of the province on the label is a particularly powerful image for visitors, he says. "It doesn't take them long to see Quidi Vidi on the map of Newfoundland and say, 'Hey, there's a brewery here. Let's try the beer.'"

In an effort to set itself apart from competitors, Quidi Vidi Brewing creates custom labels for companies and special events. "We like to do something the big guys don't do," the affable Rees says. Companies can order their own private label, indicating which of the brewery's brands is to be bottled inside. Its first private label was the Hibernia Lager, launched to celebrate the christening and tow-out of the Hibernia oil rig platform.

"Now we do them for people celebrating weddings, anniversaries, divorces, anything," says Rees. This year they are producing Le Petit Nord, a light beer, for the 2004 Society in celebration of 500 years of the French presence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

At two to three per cent of its sales, it's not a major part of their business, but one he clearly enjoys. "We can't go head to head with the Labatts and Molsons of the world, so we present our customers with more interesting things."

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