

# Donini Chocolates: tasting the sweetness of big success

Donini

By HENRY BURY  
Staff Reporter

An Italian family's love for chocolates has led to one of the biggest success stories in the "sweets" industry. And that story is still being written in Belleville by Donini Chocolate Ltd. on Hanna Court.

But the story began in a chocolate factory in Milano, Italy when at the age of 20, Nello Donini was promoted to manager.

Seventeen years later, Donini started his own chocolate factory in Vigevano. After several plant expansions, he decided to take his chocolate-making skills to Canada.

In 1979 Nello and his son, Franco Donini visited Ontario to look for a new factory location. They settled on Belleville.

And in January 1980, Donini Chocolate Ltd. began producing what is now becoming a "very tasty product."

Santina Donini, daughter-in-law of Nello Donini (who died in July of 1987) is the factory's vice-president.

She recalled how both her father-in-law and husband chose Belleville "because it was close to Montreal and Toronto."

## *Coming to Canada proves a good idea for the Doninis*

"Nello had a friend in Montreal and he asked about coming to Canada for a visit. He believed Canada was a good country to live and start his new business. He eventually visited Belleville, liked what he saw and decided to set up his chocolate factory here," she said.

"It has proven to be a very good decision for us. We're very happy in Belleville, with the size of the city and the very nice people who have helped us a lot," Donini said.

She admitted the family purposely decided to open a small factory.

"For a chocolate factory, it's a very small business. We started it this way because we didn't know the market for our chocolate recipes. But after only two years, we expanded our operation with more machinery," Donini said.

The family has purchased additional equipment over the past few years, a trend that's to continue later this year.

Donini said its chocolate sales grew "little by little" over the first few years but in the past two years alone, sales have doubled.

"Obviously, we're very happy with our business," she said.

The factory's 14 employees (another two are in the office produce hard chocolate and white chocolate

using 17 different recipes.

The manufacturer imports its cocoa beans from the Ivory Coast and after the cleaning and roasting procedures produces milk chocolate, as well as dark and white chocolate "in the European-style flavor."

Working an eight-hour shift daily, employees turn out chocolate products for bakeries, pastry shops, hotels (it's the only supplier to the Hilton chain in Canada), a large Vancouver importing firm as well as the Easter bunnies for a well-known service organization.

"We also supply our liquid chocolate to other chocolate companies who don't do their own liquid chocolate but who then make various chocolate bars," Donini said.

The vice-president said the family business hopes to expand sales to the

United States and Bahamas.

The manufacturer has a factory outlet at its Hanna Court location, allowing the public to purchase its products.

Donini believes the firm is producing an excellent product.

She said ingredients are carefully measured, every recipe is closely watched to enhance flavors and create the "subtle differences that distinguish our chocolate."

Donini said 100 per cent pure and natural ingredients "and careful attention to detail make our chocolate easy to work with and so delicious."

With "quality coming first" with its chocolates, Donini said the firm plans on remaining in Belleville for a long time.

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