

*Hawkins still the same after all these years*

*Hawkins*

**M**uch is made in this day and age of change. But Belleville's W.T. Hawkins plant (Cheezies) is making much of no change.

If staying in business and continuing to thrive for 50 years is a measure of success, Hawkins' idea of not changing its popular Cheezies formula apparently works.

The product is well-known in the Quinte area having been distributed, often for free at numerous charity events and community activities.

Its reputation for summer student work over the decades even prompted one local entertainment group, the former Freire Bros. based at Picton, to write a song about the operation.

### PEOPLE FIRST

Perhaps one of the biggest factors in W.T. Hawkins' success is the people

who have helped build the company over the years. In fact, many of the original staff still work there and there's even a waiting list to get in.

Take the example of the Fobert identical twins. When they were younger, they used to wait for their mother, who was a supervisor. After graduation, they became employees of the company. Geraldine still works at W.T. Hawkins and Joyce has just recently retired.

The twins, however, aren't the only ones to share the W.T. Hawkins' tradition. At any given time, the company has 30 full-time employees but that can fluctuate up to 80 or 90 during the busy periods. Many of these people started with the company right after graduation and have remained there to this day, while others sought to join their brothers, sisters, parents or other relations - giving a strong sense of an extended family. That's how Barbara Bosiak thinks of the company. A 26-year veteran who is being groomed to take on Woodcox's position, Bosiak will undoubtedly help carry on the W.T. Hawkins' tradition.

"We've been very fortunate," says Woodcox. "We're lucky to attract solid, clear-thinking people. We didn't do this on our own. There's a solid team behind us."

### ONLY IN BELLEVILLE

Even though the product had its roots in Chicago shortly after the end of the Second World War, Cheezies are made only in Canada, only in Belleville, and they are treasured as taste treats literally from coast to coast, especially in the western half of Canada.

Staying in business 50 years is a rare feat for almost

any company in the wake of recessions, mergers and takeovers of recent decades. But Cheezies has two other secret weapons - Jim Marker and

### NOT RETIRING

Shirley Woodcox. They share the rare achievement of being with the company from the beginning, continue to hold senior executive positions and "we have no plans for retiring," said Woodcox as she reflected on the company's 50th anniversary. "And I know I can speak for Jim," she said.

We will be seeking to expand markets and sales, especially now into Eastern Canada, and shoot for "another great 50 years."

### SECRET FORMULA

The official formula remains a company secret, but officials have confessed that it is based on corn meal and coated with genuine aged cheddar cheese. (Each batch of Cheezies is made to order so freshness is also guaranteed.)

The irregular shape of the fritter-type treats is actually one of their saleable points, Woodcox insists, along with the genuine cheese flavor.

"Every Cheezie is different. They're like snowflakes and people," says Woodcox, who is a strong link in the chain.

Some months ago, Intelligencer reporter-columnist Chris Malette was canvassing fellow staffers for ideas for a column on what's good about Belleville. Several replied spontaneously

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