

Markham garlic company's success spreading



SAM GERACI
Garlic king

Sam and Mary Geraci are going to make a million with one of the most widely-used seasonings in the world.

They are the owners of Derlea Foods, a Markham-based company which processes the pungent garlic bulb and distributes it across Canada.

Mr. Geraci is already expanding their market into the United States with distribution to Chicago and Buffalo. He also hopes to introduce his line to the Caribbean in the near future.

His products include garlic spread for bread, prepared garlic bread and chopped garlic in oil which can be used in any dish

that calls for garlic cloves.

The company he and his wife founded five years ago has grown in leaps and bounds starting with first year sales of \$150,000 and doubling sales between last year and the year before to about \$1 million.

Derlea is the only product of its kind which doesn't contain preservatives and starts with real garlic. The company also packages chopped garlic for Loblaws' No Name label and garlic spread for Canada Packers as well as prepared garlic loaves with or without mozzarella cheese.

But as Mr. Geraci explained, this sort of success doesn't come easily. He and his wife work up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week. Their daughters, Annette, 7, and Carmela, 6, spend many weekends at the company

office while they put in extra time.

The portly, 30-year-old Italian said that otherwise, he and his wife would seldom see their children.

But the satisfaction is worth it.

"We enjoy our accomplishments. We started from zero and the position we're in now makes us feel good," Mr. Geraci said.

The idea came to them about five years ago while the pair were operating a butcher shop in Toronto. They started by testing methods of making garlic bread using their family and friends as guinea pigs.

"Back home my mother used to make garlic bread using garlic, oil and oregano, so we tried it ourselves. We thought it was

good so we would invite people over to try it," he said.

Once they had a successful garlic spread recipe they made several batches, put them in large plastic tubs and went around to local restaurants selling their wares.

The response they received from restaurants gave them the confidence to set up distribution of the spread and later, chopped garlic.

Stores which carry Derlea products include, Loblaws, I.G.A., Miracle Mart, Safeway, Food City, Sunkist Fruit Market and John Vince Foods.

So what's next for these two tireless workers? Garlic oil. Mr. Geraci said they're developing the idea now and hope to have the first batch ready for delivery late this year.

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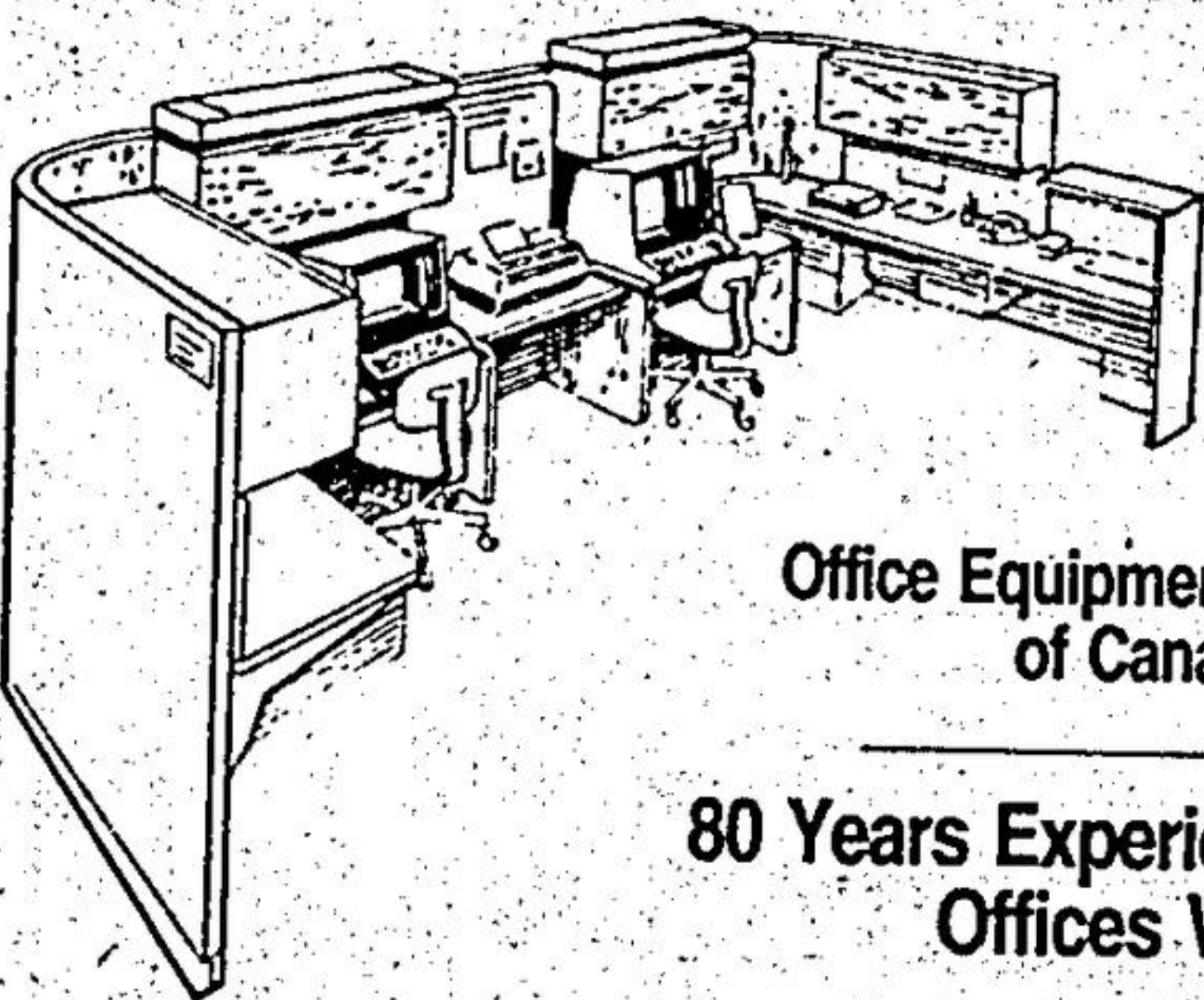
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