

Faema Story

Michele, or Mike, Di Donato immigrated to Canada in 1957 from Campania, Italy. His wife had immigrated before him as she had family in the country. Michele was always an entrepreneur as his son, Joe Di Donato, describes him. When visiting Canada in the midst of a cold November Michele asked for a “café” at a coffee shop, which in Italy would be an espresso, but he was given a coffee. This sparked an idea that in Canada people do not know what a good espresso was, and this could become an opportunity to open an espresso business.

Michele then called La San Marco, an espresso machine company in Italy, to see if they were willing to sell him espresso machines. Then in 1958 Faema, a bigger manufacturer in Italy heard of Michele and asked him to sell their product in Canada. He started by selling products out of his garage. Then he also focused on bringing gelato machines and pasta machines to Canada. In addition, he sold complete bar systems that were famous in the Little Italy area.

However, with an entrepreneur mindset Michele was already thinking of not only the commercial aspect of espresso machines but also the retail aspect, which people could buy an espresso machine for their house. Eventually he grew both sides of his business and was quite successful. To help people buy the products he went to trade shows and showed people how to make them, gave them samples to try, and so forth. About 25 years ago under the Faema business umbrella, Jura, a Swiss company, was added. Jura is now strong enough to be its own business and has now separated from Faema.

Faema’s original location was on Davenport in downtown Toronto and is still open today. The Dupont property was originally a Ford factory from 1914 to 1927, which then turned into a planters peanuts. The family then decided to purchase the property, which to this day still has two Ford Model T cars. Currently Michele is 90 years old and still working. Michele’s four children are all involved in the business which Joe states is hard to find in the present day. They hope for the next generation, their children, to also take part and work for the business.

Michele’s original mission was to bring good European style espresso to North America. Yet he realized there was more about Italian food that Italians missed back home in Italy which is why he branched out to add gelato machines to his business. Overtime he realized not only did he need to import the machines but also the espresso beans and other products that Italians were used to in Italy, thus he supplied them here in Canada. To ensure the customers were using the products correctly, to get the best results, Michele gave tutorials to ensure customers were fully satisfied with their product.

In terms of clientele Michele had a lot of support in 1985 from both the Italian and Portuguese community that understood espresso. As the years went on the clientele grew as many different nationalities wanted either an espresso, gelato, pizza oven and so forth from Faema. Furthermore, as time went on the commercial aspect of the business decreased whereas the retail sector slowly increased and not sells more. Joe states that part of increase in retail sales

could be in regard to the pandemic and more people staying at home, while the popularity of places like Starbucks has made espresso famous among the masses.

In terms of the pandemic the business has noticed a decrease in commercial purchases because a lot of the businesses that were buying from Faema are struggling or closed down. For the most part the establishment has stayed open because they sell for products for households and have been considered essential.