

Pat Pelliccione 1:46

You know, what I'll do, I'll hook you up. I'm also one of the presidents of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario (ICCO). So I don't know if you hooked up with our executive director Corrado pitino. Did you reach out to Corrado? Because after you talk to me, I'm going to give you Colorado's coordinates, called Corrado and speak with him too, because he can hook you up to a broad base of businesses and people that you could speak to sort of routinely help you out.

Italian Canadian Foodways 3:59

That would be great.

Pat Pelliccione 4:00

Yeah, it'll help you out in a big way. So I didn't know which way this was coming from was coming in through the Chamber or because--they will reach out whether it was the embassy in Ottawa, whether it was a consulates office in downtown Toronto, like the call or the Trade Office. So you know what's coming at me right? So I just noticed I saw UofT and I picked it up only because I said okay, this is gonna come in through one of those groups or I figured Okay, how else is this gonna come in? My wife has a UofT degree and she did, her study were languages: French and Italian. Italian was I think, French was her major but also Italian. She ended up teaching for for 15, 20 years. Unfortunately, our kids like I went to Western, I went through the business school there. My kids are, one just finished, both of them were at McGill, one finished his degree. Now he's in Switzerland, doing his MBA and the other guy is finishing his last two years at McGill, so they went down to McGill. They didn't want us to go to Toronto, go to any of the university mom and dad wants them to. They gotta go through and they're doing this stuff right now as well as I have nieces as well doing this. They're doing business studies on us. So it's fun. Yeah, that's our ground, right?

Italian Canadian Foodways 4:00

Yeah, it's honestly great. And like, especially like a company like yours, it's been around for as long as it has been.

Pat Pelliccione 5:21

Yeah, the name is kind of deceiving. If you check the background, that it's like the true essence of it, the pictures you're gonna get, I think I asked our marketing people to send you, that's my dad. So founder of the business naturally was my father.

Pat Pelliccione 5:34

When was it founded? I would go back to the origins: first wave of immigration after the war. He started up around [19]56 when he entered Primo. It wasn't our business. He ended up going there to work. He was a butcher, ended up working there from [19]56 until I believe about 1990. And during that period, he became an owner. Because the family originated out of Hamilton, if you know anything about Primo, and it originated out of Hamilton, it was the Polignato family. The polignato family were bakers. So the older brother decided to, you know, make some meat products. And then he ended up buying a pastificio here in Toronto. So he needed some people to help him with this. So my dad ended up going to work for him as well as I guess one of my dad's better friends and my brother's Godfather, who just passed recently, Mr. Capozzi, he, and the two of them went in there in the early, mid 50s, 55, 56. And they went in there and they put together like the business as, as they knew, and they developed his business into a business that was like, at first it was, it was not meeting, you know, making ends meet, it was very difficult. You know, money was a problem, the whole growth was a problem. But they ended up building the business to a very good size, and they had over 1000 employees. At the time, back in the 80s, they were doing over \$100 million in sales, which translates to almost probably about a billion today with inflation. And they were the leader. They were the Italian leader for the production and importation of Italian products

for the Italian community across the country. Now, what they did, was a forerunner to what we did. With the establishment of Primo, and with the founding of it in the 50s, 56, my dad was able to launch a career in the business and was able to develop the infrastructure to support even a future business after the first business was sold. So what they did was they set up manufacturing plants, and they produced pasta, they produced meat, they roasted coffee, they had tomato canning facilities. They had distribution across the country: Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver. And like I said, they actually had a biscuit plant as well. So they put this, this conglomerate together. And they did a lot of importation of Italian products.

Pat Pelliccione 7:59

And what the need was, it basically served, for lack of a better word, the immigrants that were just coming off the boat, so anybody who wanted or missed Italy and had a passion for Italian products. You know, my dad in his true form would visit Italy, probably at some points six [or] seven times a year. So he would actually, you know, buy the products and have them shipped over and eventually what they would do is they would produce the products here like the pasta, like the tomatoes, like the biscuits, like all the deli meat products, the Salamis the prosciuttos, etc. So they did that all the way through now. [19]85 came and that principal owner, Mr. Polignato Primo passed, so he passed around [19]45. When he passed with a legacy and there was a few shareholders. My dad was one, Primo, and my my brother's godfather was another one. And they decided to sell the business. So for lack of a better thing, my dad put his hat in the ring, but it was just too dear. We said for us right, it went for a lot of money. So we ended up you know, with a pretty good windfall from it. So what he did was he stayed on until 1990. So I'll bring you up to 1990. Developed infrastructure across the country where they set up other businesses to either distribute products or help them with the distribution. And around '90 he left, and what he did when he left was...he had a non compete for a few years so he had to stay out until about 95, 96. But what he did was they were able he was able to work with cheese products right so he was able to and he focused on Italian cheese products. So what happened was, you know, there was a big it was a new thing because they weren't bringing in a lot of cheese but they were bringing in some provolone but they started with original cheese. So if you're familiar with reggiano or grana padano or pecorino or asiago. They didn't have any the fresh cheeses we have today: the burrata, the buffalo mozarellas, but they started off very slowly, some old proteinase and things like that. So he did that for about five or six years and around '96, '97, my brother and I were able to come into the business because the non compete was done. We finished school and we had other investments and we kind of got back into food around '97, '98 and that's where we bought Overwheel. So we had a previous company called Colombo Importing. We bought Overwheel, we merged them.

Pat Pelliccione 10:18

So let's fast forward to today. Today what we've done in that course of time from '98 to 2021, we built a company that was probably bigger than what Primo is...was at its time. We have about 300 employees, we're a national company, we operate out of Montreal out of Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver. We also have an operation [called] Colombo USA in New Jersey that takes care of the US for us. You know our DNA is we have a big meat plant (deli meat plant), we produce Salamis and you know porchettas and prosciuttos and also blue menu stuff. We do a lot of copacking for Maple Leaf, Loblaws, Private Label, our own product under Casa Italia, export it, send it across the country. We have a biscuit plant, and a panettone plant called Milano bakery. So it's a biscuit plant if you have eaten any of our Italian-style biscuits, morning biscuits, we have those, we also make panettone [and] probably will for most of the country. So we set that up as well as we set up a large importation distribution company specializing in cheese.

Pat Pelliccione 10:23

I know your focus is on Italian, [and] we took Italian to another level. What we did was when we got in in '98, we started off with like, you know bringing in this reggiano, the wheels, the padano, the Romano, then we went to the Asiagos and we went to Montasios, then we went South to the Pecorinos out of Tuscany, then the Pecorinos out of Sicily, then we went through all the fresh cheeses: burrata, stracchinos, the buffalo mozarellas. So then the provolones. So we brought in a whole plethora of these cheeses from Italy, as well as from other countries, including England, Switzerland, France, Portugal, Spain, Lithuania, Germany. So we went right across South America. So we're probably like, I would say, probably the second or third largest cheese import in the country. And we specialize on that. And our focus, like everybody knows, is very strong with the Italian trade. What we also did was we took an interest in the Italian products as they started growing through social media and things like that. So we're strong importers of Italian meats, all Italian tomatoes, even flour to make pizza. Believe it or not, we're the largest importer of Caputo flour, which is probably the largest flour used in Canada to make the double zero flour to make the Italian-style pizza. We have biscuits coming from Italy, we have oils, and all the other ones. So anything that existed in probably '56, we've carried over to, I guess, chilled, like my dad would be considered the grandfather, then I would probably consider middle to our children. So like even to feed somebody like you. We've continued that tradition from '56. Right through, it hasn't stopped with our company.

Pat Pelliccione 13:17

Now the name Overwheel throws everybody for a loop as we're seen as a Dutch company, we bought it from a Dutch man and his family. And the reason why we never changed the name was because chains at the time, when we bought it in '98, came to us and said, "Look, if you're going to change the name, we're gonna have to charge you listing fees for all the cheeses that you're currently selling us," and it would have translated into millions of dollars rather than pay them. We call it blood money. We just said, "no problem, we'll operate under Overwheel." And they said, "But do you have a loyalty to your own company name?" I said, "our own company name was Colombo. And it didn't really mean anything. And it had no relation to us." So we've been running under Overwheel. So mostly Italians can't pronounce Overwheel, they call it JK, or JK or whatever they can figure it out, or pronounce. And that's how we ended up with Overwheel but the whole stream was, "like, okay, where did it take us?" You have immigration from '56 to '20 and '21. Immigration probably stopped at the end of the '70s. But we've been servicing that need just through the production of products here or the importation of products right directly from Italy. And every day there's new stuff coming over like, even jams, regoni, which is asiago area, honies and things like that.

Pat Pelliccione 15:47

I would say to answer your second question, what's the founders background? Definitely Italian and what region he came out of? Abruzzo, which is in the central region as a town called L'Aquila, which was hit by one of the earthquakes. And he arrived in Canada, I would say around 1952 and the first early years that my dad arrived here with his family, he was one of five children, and they came over, my grandfather came around '49. And then they came over around '50 to the rest of the family. And what they did when he initially arrived (he was a teenager), so he ended up [doing] some night school to help himself to improve, but he also worked as a butcher. And by '56, his hands were like--he said, "sorry, couldn't move many more" [which] made a lot of sense to transfer over. He picked up a job from Primo, and he just never looked back. And just so it really, really helps.

Pat Pelliccione 15:47

So why did [he] choose the food industry? You know what, it was so funny, because the early years when he came over before he became a butcher, my grandfather, all my uncles were in construction. So I guess they call him small, for lack of a better word, maybe the width, right? Because the poor guy--like construction was tough. My grandfather is a bigger man than I am.

I'm about 6'2. He was about my size. And you can imagine during the '20s and '30s, being that big. He was a beast. Yeah. So we had him and we had my uncles (my uncles were very big people too). And my dad was kind of middle, he was the middle child, but he was not big. He was small, right? So he took construction for a couple of weeks. And he said, "this is not for me to call the cold, Canada, I tried to build something and build these towers that were going up in downtown Toronto. So he gravitated toward food. And fortunately, the first job that he ended up getting was a butcher's job, which was good because in Italy, they came from their presence was from a farm. So a lot of the immigrants did come from farming towns, rather than the cities. So they had a background like the new like, even with meats and things like that, or the production like they all have their own wheat, so they would derive grain from it, they would have it milled, take it back as flour then they would make pasta with it, breads with it, and everything. And they were also good [with] animals, they had livestock so they would kill the animals like once a year if you had a pig, you kill the pig and then you would develop like make your prosciutto from the legs, you make your sausage from the meat, you would make your cappellos, you would have the jowl of it and everything else. So they would take it from the cows, they would make brosiallas and things like that. So they knew what to do with the animals. So this is why with the meat plants, it was very, very easy to transition over because they were already dry-curing stuff in Italy to serve and preserve after they didn't have refrigeration so they had to do it the old traditional way. This is the way the dry cured stuff came up and how it came through. So the original vision was I guess to survive and to be able to eat. I don't know if that's a good mission statement. I guess it was service people.

Italian Canadian Foodways 17:38

A lot of grocers were saying that. That they were like that as a way to just feed your family.

Pat Pelliccione 17:46

Yeah, so but what happened was I believe the mission statement was to service the needs of the Italian growing Italian community in Canada. And how I would say it's changed because of dynamic immigration nature of Canada has changed so we've had to change that DNA but I think initially with a food business, most of us are catering to the new ways of immigration--like I we've even ventured out to India we brought in up breads cheeses, etc. to service that growing popular population. We have more beans, more Grapeseed oils or like pigs for the Chinese and Japanese communities etc. Your vision changes based on your DNA and who's going into the stores? So like from an immigration pattern? Yeah, we could have just stuck just to Italian. But I think we would have been limited because of the growth within Canada. The Italian population is large, [but] you don't have a second generation nature, but you need to diversify and I think we also diversified off of that.

Pat Pelliccione 19:14

What would you say is your business's contribution to Italian foods? And did you have a best selling item? What item was your best selling item?

Italian Canadian Foodways 19:22

Maybe like one of the labels that is your most popular label right now?

Pat Pelliccione 19:29

Okay, I think our contribution in [the] Italian food scene I would say came after Primo because what we did after that, like you have to understand the initial wave of immigration. They were just looking for basic things. Like I said, they were working in construction, a lot of them. They had minimal amounts of--their salaries weren't like huge, and they're starting, they're coming along. And then the internet wasn't available. The internet educated so many people [and given people] a knowledge base. Back in the day, we relied on professors, we relied on word of mouth, etc. Soon as the internet came about, they'd say like, what's your contribution of Italian foods scene? Well, we took what people were seen on the internet and made it possible to be

brought into Canada. So [I'm] second generation, my dad's first. So what happened was, imagine six or seven trips a year. I do that now. Right? And he's still there. He's actually over there right now. The guy's crazy. I've been over there already twice this year. With COVID, I'll [still] go back. I was just--before I got on a call with you, I was just planning my trip I'm back Auguts 21st [and going] for tomatoes.

Pat Pelliccione 20:47

But our contribution, we saw what the needs were deriving out of the Internet, and we brought it over, what did we do? Like what's the best selling item or brands or a pretty strong brand that we have. Casa d'Italia is a pretty strong brand. But what did we do? I would say that we commercialized Italian cheese, we brought [it] to the market. We were able to bring grana padano and pecorino romano mainly the genre we took with John Oh, where it when I came in 1998 nobody knew what it was. It's a Parmesan cheese right, the big 30 8-kilo wheels, we brought those and we ended up showing the majority of Canadians how to cut these wheels, how to market these wheels, how to work with these wheels, how to develop these wheels into recipes, and work through them. So I would say that's what we're most proud of. But also, we set up these fresh cheese import programs out of Italy. So these programs, if you eat the buffalo mozzarella which is from the Campagna region, which is in the south around Naples. Or the burrata, which is from the Puglia region, which is Bari area just over to the South East what's happened with those is we developed an air freight program on a weekly shipment basis. And we bring that stuff in so these people are able to eat these fresh cheeses that are produced on Thursday in Italy and they're in restaurants or on store shelves by Tuesday morning here in Canada. So if you can imagine that, so that program, we didn't just stick to the basics. The buffalo mozzarella was initially one, burrata came and is really taking its lead. Like we actually have these products at Costco now, they're at Loblaws, Costco, Metros, Sobey's. Walmart, no, I don't know if Walmart buys our fresh. But we have a full program right across the board. And I think that's what I'm most proud of. Because when we started to do this in 2010, I think or 2009, like, I don't think anybody would have ever imagined that we're going to be successful with it. And like, the internet helped. And like you know, cooking shows like Stanley Tucci and, and the latest one from a friend from Cheese Boutique, if you're watching those ones on the Italian Heritage and Cheese Development. Like these guys, they helped us because they played to the regional differences within Italy. And they brought it over and the new generations are looking for cooking episodes, they're looking for things to do on the weekends with COVID. So they would work with these people and they would develop and they would need these ingredients to make recipes work. So a lot of times, you know, the retailer's reached out to us, if it wasn't a consumer directly through our website, or marketing part would pick it up and say, "okay, Pat, go out and find this. Well do that." That's, that's how we did it. Right. And that's how we built it. I don't know if it's cool, but it's crazy. It was it was a way to make I guess, to survive, right.

Italian Canadian Foodways 23:45

And it started off like that and now to be here. Just thinking right now about the fact that someone's making Italian shoes on Thursday, and we're gonna get on Tuesday. That's, that's insane. That doesn't feel real.

Pat Pelliccione 23:59

It's by Air Canada, you can pick it up on Sunday night. I saw [Air Canada workers] do it, right. If the package is broken, I'm sure they're enjoying some of it for us, right. But it's able to work and I think that's probably one of the greatest things that we did, we drove everybody crazy. But imagine you have shipments going into Montreal, you have shipments going into Vancouver and Toronto on the same day, right? Out of like a spot that's 5000 kilometers away, like it is kind of extraordinary and to build up enough of a demand to be able to do that and to be profitable and have customers wanting to buy it, I think that was cool.

Pat Pelliccione 24:35

And then the other thing that was really cool too was we do have a full meat plant over here but we're able to respect the integrity I don't know if you know about the DOP designations, we're products are all standardized. So I guess the platform for our business or mission statement is service Italians or the Italian-Canadian community with their desires, but we've always been true to our word where our DNA is not a source of crappy products, I don't wanna say cheap products but products, we always try to source products that have the DOP designation. So, you know, just to be able to do that with the products like that all those products that I mentioned Reggianos, DOP, Pecorino, Romano, Poovolone, the Grano Padano. And we even have DOP tomatoes, DOP 00 flour. If it's not DOP, it's IGP-related, but it's all stuff that's been recognized by the European community or the country of origin, Italy, itself as being special in the manufacturing process and the continuity of a tradition that some cases is over 500 years old. And in the case of grana padano, and reggiano. And in the case of pecorino romano stems back the time of the Roman Empire, right. So we've been able to pull this stuff over and make a livelihood, develop stories within to bring it to the market, develop recipes for it, and sell it to consumers like even your generation etc. to go out there to buy it when you go into the stores. So we did a lot of work on that. And I think that is probably the thing that we're most proud of, like it went It was tough, right? Lke I remember personally, cutting those wheels, 30 kilo wheels like on Friday and Saturday in a Loblaws store down at Queens Quay or Bathurst, then Shepherd when I mean, no, Yonge and Shepherd, when they open up that new store, St. Clair and Bathurst stores and we were all in these stores. And I remember our staff, I was showing them how to cut these wheels. And we have scores, we had like little knives to do it. And then we would cut it in front of a customer. We wrap it up, we hand it to them, they take it home and they'd be coming back in the afternoon after their morning run [saying], "can we have another piece?" We ran out and that's pretty good stuff. So we want to buy some more. So it was it was we call it a Maverick game like the days. And you know, Loblaws took a chance and they brought us in and because we had started to do the work, they saw the growth potential for it. So it just it kind of infused the story. And then we took another step further with the meats, like the Italian meats, just there's so there's so great, and we brought them in and I thought they're going to be a flop but they did absolutely so well because they were just well accepted. Right? And community growth in the internet. It really, really helped to go through.

Pat Pelliccione 27:20

So what foods did you first ever sell? And how did your business to attract customers when it first? I would say like if you go back to the early days from the '50s it was what we call the "comfort food" so we sell the pasta, right? What can people afford? They could afford more than that. Pasta, tomatoes that were coming over and cans from Italy, some olive oil. So that was the DNA, now we're still selling the conventional items.

Pat Pelliccione 27:44

But how did how did things happen? When like, how did they attract people when we first opened, I guess price unfortunately was a factor and the quality. So what we did, like I told you before, I'm gonna repeat myself, we took a quality stance like cheap is great, but she achieved it like somebody is always going to be cheaper than you if you learn anything from us right now, through this conversation, you're never going to be the cheapest no matter what you think and you think you have a corny you're not going to do it. So you're better off to establish a DNA based on quality. So that way if you have a good brand, and people buy the brand wants to know that go back in and say hey, this was the quality, I want to buy it again. So you can't be oblivious to price because naturally, sometimes the best quality is the highest price which there is a correlation to that. But you got to be fair, you got to understand that Canadian consumers I would say of a different ethnic or original base origin, Italian or German or Portuguese or whatever. They're always conscious of their spend, but they do understand quality. So if if you can give them quality at a fair value, I guarantee that they're going to gravitate back toward it. So the ability of a business to survive is not the initial sale to the first

customer I mean that the storekeeper, a shopkeeper, is the movement of the product out of the store. So like everybody could sell to a shopkeeper, shop people give most people the opportunity to put the goods in the store. But if the stuff doesn't move out of the store, you have a problem. So you have to either have some DNA where word of mouth, where quality takes down that form and it spreads, or an advertising campaign, or worst comes to worst is you enter with a low price point to get people to try it and then you raise the price up to market standards after they've tried it (that's probably the worst avenue to take). But normally it's just to either support through a marketing effort or now social media for it so it goes that way. So that's why they when it first opened, it was tough because there were Italian stores but the chains did not. And I call the chains Loblaws, Walmart, Costco, Metro, and Sobey's, they didn't have international aisle, so they were a lot of independent Italian stores. So that's where a lot of the product went. What we were producing was natural. That's where the immigrants were shopping. So they filter stores with stuff that either we were importing directly from Italy or we were producing here of Italian origin-style, and it has been sold to that.

Pat Pelliccione 30:21

Has there been a change or increase in clientele? Yeah, there has, tremendous change. Because what's happened is a lot of these mom and pop stores have closed down like regionally if you look, Montreal still operates under what we would call [an] "ethnic banner", where there are Italian stores there that operate and consumers are used to going there. Ontario is totally different, because what happens in Ontario is the chains have taken over, but also with the chains, even Walmart has an international aisle, right?

Italian Canadian Foodways 30:51

Yeah.

Pat Pelliccione 30:51

So they cater to the multitude of Canadian consumers. And the product has become mainstream. So, where has it changed? It's changed from the DNA of a small, ethnic store that's open to large, massive supermarkets say ethnic branded like Fortino's, a or 120,000 square foot store with products or staples from Italy there. If you're in Quebec, you're going to be in Euro Marché stores or Intermarché stores in the Quebec area. If you're out West, it's a little different. It doesn't really have ethnic banner stores, but they have market leader stores like you know, Federated Co Op does a good job. And then you have like the overweighted group, a Save-On stores. And they also have like Sobey's, Thrifty Foods they bought, they bought regionally they also bought Longo's and they bought Farm Boys stores and they've used those stores under their ethnic platform to drive all. Thrifty Foods is a store that's located in Victoria, and into central British Columbia. And they paid a lot of attention to ethnic products, including a lot of Italian products. They have full Italian weeks, where they have big cheese sales at Thrifty Foods. Imagine in February [you] show up to one of their stores, you're going to find wheels of reggiano and all types of Italian products coming in etc, who also come back in June, during Italian month, national Italian month. And that's when Italy's birthday is and that's why they consider it Italian month most often. And you'll see these these promotions occurring from Western Canada. 20 years ago, you won't see any of this, now you're seeing this stuff. So it lends itself from the internet, from our ability to market and pull across the country that way.

Italian Canadian Foodways 32:50

Even, I think, just as simple as like just having something like the DOP label compared to other things on the shelf like at a Walmart or something would make the difference, at least to my family.

Pat Pelliccione 33:00

It's huge. I got our DOP tomatoes at Walmart are really under priced. So we're under, I'm on the wrap right now. I think somebody told me they said most of us are at \$4.99 for DOP everywhere else Walmart, we're at \$3.97. So I just got to get in there and get in, you know, a normal tin of tomatoes before this crisis with the shipping and everything used to cost like \$0.99 cents, these DOP ones go for \$3.99, they're almost three times as much. Quality is different. Like we see the process, they're hand picked that, you know, these, there's a limited amount, it's a total different production process versus you know, like a cultivation through machinery versus cultivating by hand and wood crates. Washed, can, cooked. It's like it's like a mom and pop operation with a DOP versus a full commercial operation with the other tomato; so that's what the price differences attributed to. But he's flying these DOP products at a Walmart, who'd ever thought right? Just saving stores, they have it, Costco has them as well. So--

Italian Canadian Foodways 34:02

It's interesting that you say that they like it--because I feel like your business is a mom and pop shop, even though it's huge, and it's everywhere. Like I feel like you guys are running it with the quality of a mom and pop shop but of the international level.

Pat Pelliccione 34:18

That's the problem. That's why we pay our consultants a lot of money to come in here and try to get rid of my schizophrenia, right because it is a schizophrenic approach to business unfortunately. It served well. But it's crazy that I have these consultants that come in I feel like a couch potato sometimes when they talk to me because the normal DNA of our size, it's just like you, you don't have 1200 to 1600 SKUs, you have 150 SKUs. You cut everything else out. You just go mainstream. So yeah, Reggiano's mainstream but we're just going to bring in a 250 gram wedge and forget the wheels, forget the quarter wheels for the rsest, forget the kilos for the...One of the weges for everybody, right? As you know, that DNA doesn't work and then what type? Well okay, I can bring in a reggiano that's over 22 months, I can bring it over reggiano of 30 months, 48 months, I can bring in reggiano that was made from a vacche rosa cow like a different cows, that white cow, so there's all different parameters right and there's organic reggiano, plant-based organic reggiano. So they're like sitting there going, "okay, that's too much information, like, 'how would I know the difference?' Right? And I just said, 'we got to hear it. I'll put five pieces in front of you tell me which one you like and you're picking them up?' I like them all. Likes one better than this one. Well, this is a vacche rosa reggiano". Okay, but how do we get that to go mainstream? I said it's difficult and we have a limited production. So we have to offer these mainstream ones. Okay, we like that, we like this age profile. We don't like these profiles. So this is what this is how we move the business forward and was allowed us to do that is I would say social media, the internet, because it's educated people, like speed that we could never educate them. Right? They go on they know like some of the customers that call in are coming into our, our chat lines or our on our websites. And they ask us questions, like some of these questions are like, "Oh, geez, man, where do they get this information?" Like, they dealt with, they found out, we're on their last trip to Italy, they were talking to somebody, they ended up at a location and this is what transpired. So I gotta go, we got to go over, we got to, you know, understand, and we got we're supposed to be the specialist. So we have to be one step ahead of them. So sometimes the learning like right now I'm learning as much as we talked before, right before we were teaching, because we were learning first and then teaching now. They're teaching us in some cases, right? Yeah. It's fun.

Pat Pelliccione 36:45

Okay, if applicable, how is your business changed over time? Oh, my God,



Italian Canadian Foodways 36:49

I think you've probably, you've gone over that. Maybe, if we could go to the pandemic question?

Pat Pelliccione 36:55

Yeah, the pandemic.

Italian Canadian Foodways 36:59

You guys didn't close down, you continued.

Pat Pelliccione 37:01

We were pretty fortunate, like what we did, I think most businesses have done this, is we have to put a committee in to analyze and work the pandemic right. We have people from marketing, people from sales, people from administration, quality assurance, warehousing, because we have different warehouse sites here. Production and management, ownership. So we formed this committee back in, you know, explain how we changed, right. We formed this committee back in March of 2020, still operates today and the early days, we're meeting three times a week. Now we meet every second week, just due to the urgency or the current status of the pandemic. And so what how did it change the way we operate? Well, it's been I guess, from an owner perspective, it's costs us more money to operate today versus like a year ago, because of the standards that we had to put into combat this pandemic. Like we have, you know, shift work. There's a lot more cleaning going on. We have to physically distance people inside plants we have production lines now where people were able to stand beside each other and work. Now there's a gap between them, there's actual, I think we've made companies rich just buying that plastic, you know, the plastic,

Italian Canadian Foodways 38:20

Plexiglass?

Pat Pelliccione 38:21

Plexiglas and like we come into this office, like everybody has their own cage almost, like we had, you know, open area, but now they're all cornered off, sectioned off with plexiglass. You have to operate freely in terms of we can have people move between warehouses and between offices and between production centers. So that stops so a lot more virtuals going on like our conversations. So how is the business changed number one product skews in the early days the pandemic we anything that was in a bulk format was basically tossed, we couldn't even sell it a lot of it went into the garbage. We couldn't even give it out to the food banks because they weren't even open, half of them. So we threw out, a lot of the industry threw out and a lot of product because the delis weren't operating. In our case, if you had a deli, there was a there's a gravity toward, everybody gravitated to tin product. So tin bottle product I think you've got to hear so anything that you've had in your warehouse that you had imported or produced, if it was a tin product or had some shelf life to it, and we are cleaned out in a matter of minutes. They're just buying in droves and selling and marking up the prices. But anything in bulk cheese or bulk meat--that was pretty sad because we would end up throwing a lot of that out. We had to get things in wedges. The other thing that we saw, that really changed a lot of the countries that we were dealing with, and they still are doing this, they're taking care of their own country. Like there's an obligation for manufacturers of food products in certain countries, Italy being one of them to take the price of their producers, supply the whole population basically during this pandemic. So their second nature is to export to people like us. So if we didn't have the, our plants are very busy, they're working almost at capacity, both of them, because we've had to upgrade the plants during this period so that we can service the need, because people are looking domestically to make sure that they have product available to eat, right, because we can't rely on the shipping channels or taking almost a month longer to get stuff, the cost prohibitive, they're almost double, triple the price to ship goods across from the

Atlantic or across the Pacific Ocean, to Canada. So that's how it's changed. Like it's changed in the the size formats of products, like everybody wants prepackaged stuff, nobody has to preambule anything. Everybody wants stuff that has longevity with life, like canned stuff, or bottled stuff. And anything that is like a fresh nature, like our fresh program, we were able to continue with it, because of the way we put the parameters in to establish it. And there is a need for the export market, because a lot of that program goes to the export market. So we're able to do it. But in many cases, a lot of the countries basically held back. They say, "hey, look, we're not going to, we're not going to export, we got to feed our own population." So we know in some cases, we're cutting down on supply. And you know, that's why I got to go back in a couple weeks because they never had enough tomatoes like we're running, we ran out of tomatoes, I couldn't believe I would run out of canned tomatoes. But I'm at a point now where they're telling me, "Hey, by luck, believe it or not, this year coming up, you know what the shortage is going to be not the crop itself. But the stainless steel to make the tins, they don't have enough. There everybody's on allocation." Because the COVID, it ate up all the supply last year when people were gravitating toward canned products, so that they could survive, probably around danger. Yeah, look, look in your eyes, I'm going to the grocery store, and I'm going to be open to more than--we buy anything I can so I can survive and I can eat, right?

Pat Pelliccione 41:56

Yeah. So this is like, I believe that how has it changed? it is put more cost into it. It's caused us to operate more cautiously. Not that we weren't, because it food you have to have, like with the DNA of the products that we have. You have to have strong quality control. You don't open meat plants, you're not able to bring in cheese because the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, controls all that stuff.

Pat Pelliccione 42:20

So it's from an immigrant basis, like how do you look at it development? The '50s? Yeah, what was the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that were bringing over whatever they want it, right, you got through the '80s and '90s. And I see [in the] 2000s we have Canadian inspectors almost all over us for everything that we do. There's a lot more parameters that we have to deal with, in order to satisfy a regulation. So [we have to] be careful how we're doing stuff.

Pat Pelliccione 42:49

Okay, what is your future for your business? Oh survival?

Italian Canadian Foodways 42:54

Are we thinking the kids? Do you think the kids will make an appearance?

Pat Pelliccione 43:03

I have my brother, one of my my brother's kids are in right now. And do they want to continue in the food business? Yeah, I think they do. My kids, I don't know, they keep telling me, "Dad, we're going to be professionals and we're not coming in, right? But it's tough because like it's just different. Like the DNA is a little different, like the working atmosphere, the environment, like food, unfortunately, it's good in the fact that you work five days, it seems like seven days a week because you work from Monday to Friday. So we trained ourselves, usually Saturday and Sunday, the stores have to work because they sell the product that you bring in from Monday to Friday. But it is the long intense hours like distribution is difficult, manufacturing. If you're running three shifts, which are some of the plants were running and working like, some plants don't stop if you're in a cheese plant yo get milk 24/7, like every day, you're going to get a shipment of milk. Cows don't stop milking because it's Saturday or Sunday. So when you're looking at it, for new generations, they're like not trained for seven days a week, you don't want to do that, you want to have a life, you know, quality of life. So [in the] future, I won't be in survival. I'm going to continue to be able to exist in Canada. Continuing to bring in these quality products and develop them if it's not under our launch, the business is sold. It's what

you don't want. Like what happened is there's a lot of consolidation going on and you see what consolidation there's less plus, so it's kind of scary. So this thing you're writing upon, it's peaked already, like it started in the '50s. I would say with the first waves in the '40s, it was just, you know, there was domestic stuff people didn't understand. Freight people didn't move out of their home, where they were born or they live then after the war moving around. Airplanes became predominant. He saw the whole growth, etc., started coming over. And then with the internet, it just exploded because it just opened up people's eyes to what's available and people ended up figuring out different ways to bring it over. But, I would say, the businesses like ours have peak because with Amazon coming in, and other people, they're able to fulfill the need that we've created a lot more economically and vibrantly, because they're really strong, right?

Pat Pelliccione 45:30

So where's it going? There is going to be a future. There's always a future, I'd say if you're manufacturing and doing stuff like that, but it's not going to be easy, because it's the consolidation. There's so many large players now, trying to do it. The authenticity is going to go is going to go by the wayside. Because when you have these large organizations like aka Amazon, you lose a lot of culture, identification, etc. They just become serving masses and they do it well. And new generations are used to pointing clicking and doing it. But even all our DNA of what we're setting up here, we're setting up all this stuff to come in point click and even sales people and we have 41 sales people across the country that we employ. They live all over. They live in Quebec, they live in Ontario, like we have one up north of Kitchener there. They're in Calgary, they're live on the island of Victoria, Vancouver. We have all these people, but they're becoming obsolete because customers, like you, have a website and we order-- that's what they do now.

Italian Canadian Foodways 46:37  
Yeah. 100%

Pat Pelliccione 46:38  
Kate, did that help?

Italian Canadian Foodways 46:41  
I can't tell you how much it helped! I'm just gonna pause it.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>