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Family store continues Italian food tradition

By TAYLOR BARKER - 7/11/2014



http://www.rbj.net!/userfiles/image/smbiz_lombardis.jpg Mary and Anthony Lombardi own the business with brother John. Half the store is devoted to food—including 150 kinds of oil—and half to gifts and cookware. (Photo by Kimberly McKinzie)

Family tradition is evident throughout the aisles and rows of homemade pastas and sauces, oils, cookware and pottery at Lombardi's Gourmet Imports and Specialties in the village of Fairport.

The owners, Mary, Anthony and John Lombardi, based their store on an original location in Italy, where the whole family was born, except Anthony. Their father opened Lombardi's in Calabria and started the family tradition.

When the store opened in Fairport in 1985, it was half the size and was considered a specialty deli. Customers could come in to buy freshly cut meat and prepared sandwiches. The store also did catering on request but stopped that to focus more time on homemade products and develop new sauces.

In 1990, the family decided to expand the store's size. Currently the space is split between a gift shop and the food market. The business is rebranding itself as Lombardi's Gourmet Foods.

Of the eight siblings in the family, Mary Lombardi is the only female involved with the family business.

"Business has always been part of my blood," she says.

When she and her brothers first opened Lombardi's Gourmet Foods, specialty stores were uncommon.

Lombardi's Gourmet Foods' specialty is high-quality, traditional Italian goods. A large selection of the food is imported, but some products are domestic. Homemade items include oils, balsamic vinegars, pasta, bread, sauces, meatballs, cannolis and pizzettes. There are a variety of flavors and options for their products, like pumpkin gnocchi; chicken, artichoke and spinach ravioli; chili and chipotle oil; and lobster marinara sauce.

Because of the wide variety of products, Mary Lombardi says, Lombardi's Gourmet Foods does tastings every day so customers can make informed decisions. With the store carrying more than 150 types of oil, tastings are important because not every flavor will suit someone's palate, she adds.

While the main focus of the store is food, half of the store is devoted to cookware and gifts. Lombardi's Gourmet Foods carries a wide selection of Le Crueset, All-Clad, Portmeirion Pottery and Chantal brands. The combination of food, cookware and pottery is one of the main concepts of the store.

"It's not only the food; we're here from ingredients on up. Actually, we can feed you and set your table," Mary Lombardi says, "meaning we have the ingredients that you are able to make it all, but we also have the implements to cook it with and present it with, like dinnerware."

The store typically employs six to eight people, but that fluctuates with the season. Anthony Lombardi says the fall is the busiest time for the store and it typically needs more employees then.

He says the business is always looking to keep up with the competition through changes and expansions where necessary. Lombardi's Gourmet Foods is looking to expand its online store to sell more products.

"We have a very good selection for anyone's palate and anyone's purse," Mary Lombardi says.

Taylor Barker is a Rochester Business Journal intern.

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