

The History of Royal Ice Cream
by
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Royal Ice Cream was founded in 1926 by Michael A. Orfitelli Sr., an Italian immigrant who forged an honorable reputation by producing Italian Ice Cream Desserts.

Michael Sr., my Grandfather, came to this country from Telese, Italy when he was 16. Although he had little further schooling in America he taught himself the English language and became a well-read man. He worked at different companies around the state when he was young and learned what he could about business in America. During those early years Michael Sr. worked at the Manchester Dairy on Summit Street which was a Sealtest Dairy at the time.

It was at that point that Michael Sr. visualized his own ice cream business and decided to venture out on his own. He almost named the company Sunset Dairy because of its proximity to Sunset Hill which borders the west end of the facility today where Warren and Village Streets dead end. In the very early days the company was called Royal Ice Cream with a crown over the "R" along with the slogan "King of Frozen Desserts".

Michael Sr. and Nancy had 8 children two of whom, Harold and Michael Jr., came into the business. At various times the other six would reluctantly help out, but help they did.

As the business grew and succeeded, Michael Sr. bought all the houses on the north side of Warren Street and shortly after that bought 2 four-family homes on Wells Street. His plan was to have the workers live in the houses at low rent and include this as part of their wages. My Grandfather loved family and would hold large pizza parties in the garages used to house the delivery trucks.

I also heard that when my Grandfather wanted to show his siblings in Italy how successful he was in America he took his new Buick over with him when he visited. While he was there the transmission had problems and it would only go in reverse and no one there could fix it. He ended up driving it 40 miles backwards to get to the ship that would bring it back to the states!

A little known fact is that Rudy Kissman, the town's previous fire marshal, worked at the dairy when he got out of the Navy. He would tell me the story that my grandfather, Michael Sr., was building a patio at his house. He would tell Rudy to take a break from bagging popsicles and work on the patio- "that was your grandfather's idea of a break!".

Michael Sr. and Company survived the great Depression and the hurricane of '38. Years prior to the hurricane Michael had a generator installed. It is my understanding that after the storm Royal was one of the few places in town that had power and they stored blood for the hospital in their coolers.

Harold and Mike Jr. took the business to the next level of growth, adding novelties and further expanding the specialty line with items like Nut Roll, Jimmy Roll and Cake Ala Mode. For many years the town school system bought its ice cream from Royal. Ice cream sandwiches and Dixie cups were commonplace and a familiar sight in the Manchester school system. Mike would take care of the deliveries and Harold "Babe" (as he was known for being the youngest of the eight) would take care of making the ice cream. They worked well together growing the business throughout the state and developing a good name in the ice cream industry.

By the late 60s Babe and Mike realized that continuing the manufacturing of popsicles, Dixie cups and sandwiches would not be in their best interest for further growth. They made the decision to discontinue these lines and concentrate on the specialty desserts. Even though there was fierce competition it just made sense to go this route. In the 50s and 60s there were over 60 manufacturing dairies in the state of Connecticut, today there are only a handful.

In the late 70s, I (Jim) came into the business. Harold and Jeannette had three other sons and as their aunts and uncles before them, they helped out in the business as needed before moving on to their chosen careers. For the next 15 or so years I worked the business under the direction and guidance of my father and Uncle Mike. Uncle Mike retired in the early 80s and Harold eventually toned down his presence to allow me to take charge. Harold retired in the late 80s. All the while the company was developing new and more interesting dessert items to meet the ever growing demand for new products.

Around 1995, and after years of trucks always present on the state roads, Jim made the decision to stop all wholesale deliveries and sell everything through distributors. By this time, Royal had extensive business throughout the state of Connecticut and in the neighboring states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York.

As they say in life "timing is everything". It worked out perfectly as we found distributors for our entire

customer base, and some of the employees that were no longer needed went to work for the new distributors.

Today Royal Ice Cream has its fourth generation working in the business off and on while they attend college and make the decision as to what career path they will take. Royal is going strong. We have gone from local, to regional, to national and soon to international. Royal ships its products as far west as Michigan, as far south as Florida, and within a few weeks of this writing will be shipping a new high protein ice cream to Singapore and Ice Cream Pies and cakes to Ireland. We have taken on the manufacturing responsibility for the Specialty Desserts Company located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida which involves high speed cookie and stick novelty production. Unlike sixty years ago, it's now all automated.

Two years ago we completed the first of a two part expansion plan, upgrading all our refrigeration operations to computer controlled. New ice cream making equipment took us from 3.5 gallons a minute to 17.5 gallons. A high speed packaging machine wraps 150 pieces of ice cream a minute and our cookie sandwich machine assembles a cookie sandwich untouched by human hands at 120 a minute. Our customer base/distributors are companies like H P Hood, Hersey's, Kemps, Guida's Dairy and Garelick.

Our ice cream is served and enjoyed by some very prominent people and places. Kathryn Hepburn was a big fan of our maple walnut and once sent her brother to the dairy to pick up some because the local ice cream parlor in Old Saybrook was out. Donald Trump enjoys a special Cherry Vanilla made with burgundy cherries at all his hotels and restaurants. (Rumor has it that it's the only flavor he eats). The Waldorf in New York City serves our Vanilla Ice Cream exclusively, and the Royal Wich has won awards in Connecticut Restaurant Culinary and the Los Angeles County Fair. The Historical Society serves the Royal Wich as the sole dessert at Cruisin' On Main. (By the way, look for our new wrapper this summer at the event.)

Shortly we will be approaching the town of Manchester for permission to build a large freezer off the back of the building and complete the second part of our expansion. Manchester has been good to Royal Ice Cream and I like to think that Royal Ice Cream has been good for Manchester. It is our goal to stay in Manchester and continue to grow and support our community. The public is always welcome to visit our retail outlet at the plant on Warren Street.

www.royalicecream.com

To the Royal Ice Cream Plant

From I-84 East or West:

- Take I-384 East.
- Stay on I-384 for approx. 3 miles to Exit 3, Rt 83.
- At the end of Exit 3 ramp, turn left at light.
- Take the first road on the right, Warren Street.
- Royal Ice Cream is at the end of Warren Street.