

Small Business, Big Ideas

by Jim Murray

The impressive credentials of former UNICO Chapter president, Carl DiCapo, are well documented. In 2003 DiCapo was the recipient of the prestigious Joseph P. Cianci Award presented by UNICO National, and is the longest standing member in the Kansas City chapter, joining UNICO in 1964.

As a restaurateur, Carl retired as president and chairman of the board of Italian Gardens restaurant for over 46 years, and is a member of the Missouri Restaurant Hall of Fame.

His son, John David, grew up learning the food business and fondly remembers the hours he spent rolling meatballs in the restaurant kitchen as a teenager.

His mother, Sugie is renown for her skill in baking extraordinary Italian cookies. For years her friends and family prodded her to go into business and market her product.

In November 1999 Sugie and John David established a cookie factory located at 901 E 19th Street, near downtown Kansas City.

John David became disenchanted with working in the pits at the Board of Trade and yearned to get back into the food business. As the businesses

progressed he realized the need to expand their product line. He negotiated a licensing agreement with Jim's Famous Tamales, which has been

tamales, chili, ronghini (lightly breaded blend of seasoned meats, rice and cheese balls) as well as their specialty Italian cookies.

factory is in perpetual motion, turning out 10,000 cookies per day.

"We sell our products to Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG), a food co-op which, in turn, sells to area retail grocers," said John David.

The DiCapo family also self-distributes cookies, with the most popular item being the assorted three pack tray. Other special packs include biscotti (almond) gigulana (sesame and pecan) and a new item, mandal bread, an authentic Jewish cookie.

"We also ship all over the country, even as far as Iraq and Paris," said John David.

They sell assorted cookies in bulk to Argosy Casino and to numerous restaurants. Another consumer group is wedding parties and various social events. One of DiCapo's largest customers is LaSala's Italian Deli located on 5th and Missouri in old Columbus Park, and the original home of the "poor boy" sandwich. It was created there during the Depression.

Plans for expansion are currently in place with the opening of a new drive-through located on Barry Road near Zona Rosa in the Northland. John David plans to call it The Italian Gardens.

"We do business the old fashioned way, where a hand shake means something, and I plan to keep it that way," he said.



Sugie DiCapo

John David DiCapo

located in Independence since the 1920s, and The Chili Shack Restaurant Group.

Currently, DiCapo Foods prepare

Sugie and John David employ three full-time workers plus three more at Christmas when the cookie business escalates tremendously. The small



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