

Hand Rolled Pretzels — You Can Taste The Difference

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AKRON (Lancaster Co.) —

People from all over the world visit a small pretzel factory located at 1229 Diamond Street in Akron.

They come to buy pretzels, to watch the workers hand twist the pretzels with lightning speed, and to listen to the a capella harmonizing of the assembly-line workers.

With a smile of satisfaction, Clarence Martin, owner of Martin's Pretzels, surveys the pretzels that spill from the bake ovens and the assembly line workers whose voices and fingers never miss a beat as they form soft mounds of dough into pretzel shapes and sing their favorite hymns.

"What better job could I have?" he asks, "than to make a product good for mankind and spread the joy of the Lord with singing?"

While Lancaster County abounds with pretzels of all sizes, shapes, and flavors, Clarence doesn't fear competition.

"You can taste the difference," he said. "I'm fully sold on my product."

So are many of his customers. One wrote, "Your pretzels are not the best in Pennsylvania — they're the best in the world."

According to Clarence, the taste difference does not depend on the ingredients but on the method.

"The only way to make a good pretzel is to hand roll it. The texture is different, the size is different, it tastes different," he said.

That is why an automated pretzel roller sits silently in the corner of the building.

Clarence points toward the machine and says, "With that, it only takes four people to do the

work of 10, but the pretzels don't taste the same."

He wants to maintain the same flavor Martin's Pretzels had when the business was founded in the 1930s. That was when Clarence's Uncle Henry Martin purchased a pretzel recipe from a man in Reading. The uncle began making the pretzels in a shop in back of his Akron home. Eighteen years ago, the uncle sold the business to Clarence's brother, Lloyd, who operated it for 10 years before selling it to Clarence.

Lloyd had seven children who he wanted to raise on the farm. When he sold the business to Clarence, it was producing 800 pounds of pretzels daily. Now, Martin's makes 1,600 pounds daily.

Unlike many pretzels, Martin's have no shortening in them. Only flour, salt, and sour dough yeast are used.

"That makes them crunchier," Clarence said.

Customers who prefer crunchy pretzels send letters proclaiming their loyalty.

One wrote, "While eating a pretzel, I broke off part of a tooth filling. But I would still eat your pretzels even if I lost all my teeth."

Letters such as that cause Clarence to say, "Can you imagine how wonderful it is to have a business that spreads so much joy?"

It confirms that Clarence made the right decision eight years ago, when he left his 15-year career as a construction worker to purchase Martin's Pretzels from his brother.

"I like working with people and making pretzels a lot better than building houses," Clarence said.

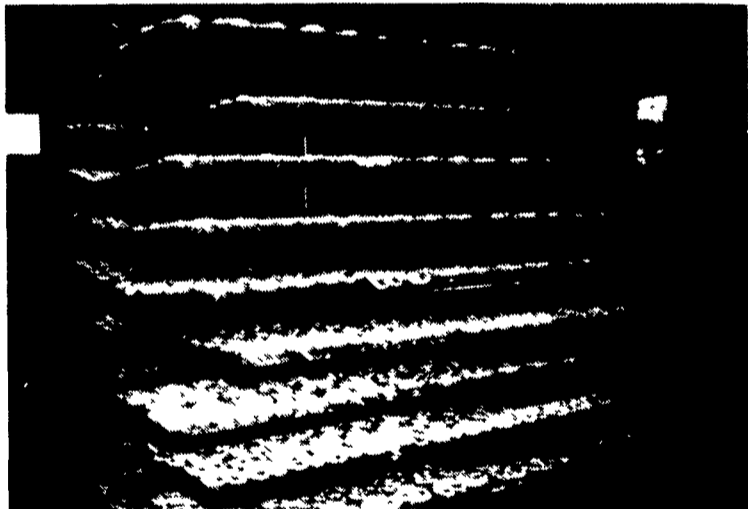
Apparently his brother missed the pretzel business, because six



The voices and fingers of the assembly-line workers never miss a beat as they hand twist pretzels and sing their favorite songs.



The dough is fed into a hand cranked apparatus that cuts and shoots out uniform pieces of dough for the workers to twist into shape.



The freshly formed pretzels are left to rise before baking. About 1,600 pounds of pretzels are made daily.

years after he sold the business to Clarence, he opened up a pretzel company in New York. He uses the same recipe and also calls them Martin's Pretzels.

Another company in Lancaster County also uses the same recipe

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Although he is 84-years-old, the father of Clarence Martin packs pretzels daily at the plant.



Clarence Martin, owner of Martin's Pretzels, insists that pretzels that are hand rolled taste differently than those rolled by a machine.

Homestead Notes