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Entenmann’s shuts Bay Shore plant

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ALL GONE!
LONG ISLAND’S FAMOUS BAKED GOODS MAKER CLOSES ITS BAY SHORE PLANT

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LI BUSINESS

Leaving a bittersweet legacy

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From a small bake shop on Main Street to a big factory on Fifth Avenue in Bay Shore, Entenmann’s called Long Island home for nearly a century. That era ended this month when its bakery there stopped producing the brand’s famed pastries.

The once family-run company has deep roots in the hamlet of Bay Shore, where Entenmann’s became a point of pride, a vital social force and an economic boon.

“Entenmann’s is synonymous with Bay Shore,” said Donna de-Luca Periconi, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Bay Shore. “Three generations of Entenmann’s have served our community as bakers and benefactors.”

Entenmann’s, a baker of chocolate chip cookies, cakes, doughnuts and an array of other goods, ceased production in Bay Shore on Aug. 13.

After nearly a century on LI, Entenmann’s shuts Bay Shore plant

The bakery is the latest casualty of Long Island’s high costs, which have driven other manufacturing companies, ranging from aerospace giant Northrop Grumman to home security company Ademco, to slash employment or move away.

“The bakery was closed because it can no longer effectively compete in the market,” said David Margulies, spokesman for Entenmann’s parent company, Bimbo Bakeries USA, which bought Entenmann’s in 2009 for $173 million.

Of the plant’s 265 workers, 176 were laid off as the company shifted production to other locations, including Pennsylvania.

Remaining jobs will include research and development, technology and marketing, Margulies said; he wouldn’t specify how many jobs would remain.

The local economy has, since the 1980s, shifted from manufacturing and construction to service industries, such as legal services, accounting, health care, fast food and retail, said Irwin Kellner, Port Washington-based chief economist for MarketWatch.com.

“Sales and property taxes, health care, fuel prices and electricity tend to be much higher than the rest of the country,” Kellner said. “It translates into higher living costs and employees wanting to be fairly compensated.”

Many laid-off Entenmann’s employees, who received severance packages, spent decades working at the Bay Shore plant, which turned out pastry puffs, twists and cinnamon buns and other treats in bakery boxes brimming the signature ribbon of royal blue letters.

“I’m going to miss going to work,” said Joseph Fiorentino, 76, of Bay Shore, a baker who started working for the sweet goods company in 1954 and was the longest-serving employee.

Because of his age and time at the company, he was eligible for retirement benefits and a pension when he was laid off. For his 40th and 45th anniversaries with the company, the Entenmann’s family had awarded him watches engraved with his name. “When I started working, mostly everything was done by hand,” he said. “Now it’s all machinery.”

The Bay Shore facility at its peak in the 1990s employed more than 1,500 people.

The March announcement of the closing did not come as a complete shock to many; it left some former workers crestfallen and nostalgic. About 150 former Entenmann’s employees gathered this month in Bay Shore to remember old times.

“It was our final bash of saying goodbye to Entenmann’s,” said Vinny Boccio, 63, of Lindenhurst, who retired in 2005 and keeps a 100-page scrapbook highlighting his 27 years working for Entenmann’s, including photos, news clips and even his first paycheck, for $173. “The night was filled with happiness and sadness. But I guess with the obsolescence equipment that they had here it was easier to move to Pennsylvania.”

Ties to the community

For many who grew up with Entenmann’s, as the largest employer in the area, the emotional attachment is unbreakable. Entenmann’s remained a family-owned business for more than 80 years until 1978, when it was sold to pharmaceutical and consumer-goods giant Warner-Lambert for $233 million.

“Entenmann’s hired generations of local families,” said Susanne Ankner, 56, of Bay Shore, who worked as a packer for 20 years. She attended college while working there, and in 1998 she left to become a teacher. “Most people would say they were all grateful for the job because it was a good-paying job and people were well provided for.”

Decades after the Entenmann family sold the bakery, family members were still at the forefront of such community projects as the construction of the Great South Bay YMCA in 1991 and North Shore-LI’s Entenmann Family Cardiac Center in Bay Shore in 2011. The company still sponsors Islip Town’s Entenmann’s Great South Bay Run.
scheduled this year for Oct. 4.

"To the Entenmanns, this community is part of their heritage and their roots," said Bob Petersen, executive director of the YMCA in Bay Shore. "All of their help has contributed to why downtown Bay Shore has seen a renaissance over the last 15 years. They are very humble and very unassuming. They never want recognition."

From Brooklyn to Bay Shore

Entenmann's founder, William Entenmann, a German immigrant, opened his first bakery in 1898 in Brooklyn, where he sold his breads, rolls and cakes door to door by horse and buggy. His son, William Jr., moved the family business to a small bake shop on Main Street in Bay Shore in 1924.

"I remember as a kid, it was kind of like going into the Willy Wonka chocolate factory, but now you're in a cake factory," said Ankner, whose mother, Susanne Silhan, also worked for the company. "It smelled of powdered sugar and chocolate. I mean just boxes and boxes of crumb cake, and you're looking through them for the very best crumb cake."

In 1959, believing people were more inclined to buy what they can see, William Jr.'s sons William, Robert and Charles and their mother, Martha, developed a see-through box for the baked goods.

"It was really nice working with them," said Silhan, 79, of Bay Shore, who was initially picked to work at the Main Street store through a random drawing and spent 52 years working for Entenmann's as a packer until she retired in 1992. "The three brothers were working in the factory. We would be over here packing, and they would be icing cupcakes by hand."

The company relocated in 1961 from Main Street to the factory on Fifth Avenue, which grew to be a 14-acre plant. In 1972 the bakery introduced the chocolate-dipped doughnut, one of its most popular products.

"My first time there I was like a kid in a candy store," Boccio said. "Lines of apple pies going this way, cheesecake this way, and I am just looking like, "Oh my God, look at this place."" William Entenmann Jr. died in 1951 at age 47, and Martha died in 1996 at 89. William Entenmann III died in 2011 at 79. In July, Robert Entenmann put up for sale the Martha Clara Vineyards in Riverhead, named after his mother, for $25 mil-

1980s BEGINNINGS

From Brooklyn to Bay Shore

Entenmann's son, William Jr., moved the business to Main Street, Bay Shore.

1924 MOVE TO LI

1961-2014 EXPANSION After relocating to Fifth Avenue, bakery plant grows to 14 acres.

The corporate parade


Bimbo Bakeries USA is a division of Mexico's Grupo Bimbo, one of the world's largest baking companies, which generated more than $13 billion in sales in 2013. Bimbo Bakeries has over 75 manufacturing facilities and more than 27,000 employees in the United States. American brands of the company, headquartered in Horsham, Pennsylvania, include Arnold, Boboli, Freihofers, Sara Lee, Streichmann and Thomas.

Since 2007 Entenmann's has endured hundreds of job cuts and the transfer of some of its baking operations. The Bay Shore facility will continue to distribute sweet treats, and an adjoining outlet store will sell to the public.

Bimbo did not approach New York about incentives or assistance to remain on Long Island, a spokesman for the Empire State Development Corp. said. "We have a long history working with the New York State and county governments, and these entities have always been very supportive of BBU," Margulies said. "After conversations with the town, it was clear there was no scenario where the bakery could successfully compete in that market."

"Bay Shore needed the Entenmann's bakery for jobs," Perico said. "It was one of the most important businesses we had ... and the one we were the most proud of."