

Who's Your Papa?



DID YOU HEAR?

Baking & Snack featured Papa Pita's tremendous growth August 2013



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Nothing but the Best

Papa Pita's new \$50 million bakery comes with all the bells and whistles to create affordable, healthful new products for today and beyond the foreseeable future.

by Dan Malovany

When Papa Pita Bakery reached capacity three years ago, Farzad Mohebbi knew the company hit a critical crossroads that would determine the direction of the business for years to come. Option No. 1? He could play it safe and expand the 50,000-sq-ft facility located on four acres just a stone's throw from Salt Lake City's airport.

That was certainly a tempting alternative. "We had no debt and a thriving business at that time, and I was living a comfortable life," said Mr. Mohebbi, president and CEO, who owns Papa Pita with his wife, Yolanda. "I could have taken the easy road out."

Option No. 2? He could place a huge bet and put it all on the line.

"The gambler in me said, 'Let's do it the right way,'" he recalled. "We didn't need to do it. It was a matter of *wanting* to do it and believing we can do something spectacular."

Two personal factors motivated him to take the leap. First, Mr. Mohebbi wanted to build something special for his family, specifically for his daughter, Maya, and son, Kiyani. "I was rejuvenated by my two young children back then. The old saying 'children keep you young' had a whole new meaning for me having a 7- and 8-year-old who are just incredible," he said.

Second, Mr. Mohebbi felt he owed his employees who had worked with him and stood by his side during the ups and downs over the years. "I get goose bumps when I talk about my children and my team," he observed. "I have some very loyal people who have been with me for years. They shared in our vision, and they felt there was nothing that we couldn't do together. I

Freshly baked loaves of Papa Pita Great Grains bread leave the oven and travel on a spiral cooler. All of the bakery's equipment is totally washdown.



The bread line's nonstick cone rounder uses light warm air to round doughs without flour or with a slight dusting of flour or a dab of oil.

wanted this for them as much or more than for myself."

Today, that vision has become reality. The new 200,000-sq-ft facility in West Jordan, UT, produces flatbreads, tortillas, bagels, buns and premium sandwich breads, and it has the capacity and versatility to meet anything the market can envision for years to come.

That is no exaggeration, according to Mr. Mohebbi. Relying on his engineering background and decades of experience, he personally oversaw — no teams of engineers or consultants at his side — the design of the new bakery that will eventually house five makeup systems feeding three tunnel ovens.

By using multiple makeup lines to feed two of the three ovens, the bakery can adjust its schedules, move its existing makeup lines or adapt its production lines to ensure the bakery's ovens are kept full as customer demand for one product increases or wanes.

"One thing that was big on my mind when I designed this bakery was to have the flexibility not only to make our products today but also to make the products of tomorrow," he said. "Most companies put themselves in a box with a budget and tie their lines to specific products. My knowing the spectrum of the product line and envisioning a production line that can do any and all of those products in an efficient manner was key to designing these lines. It's not just a flatbread line."

Additionally, he noted, when investing in the ballpark of \$50 million, a family-owned bakery needs to keep every potentially foreseeable — and unforeseeable — option open and demand attention to every detail. In dealing with suppliers, Mr. Mohebbi vetted, negotiated and even haggled to make sure that he got the biggest bang for the buck.

Although he calls himself a gambler, he did everything in his power to minimize his risks.

"Instead of telling them what I wanted built, I got a list of everything they could build or have built in a system," he said. "I went to each manufacturer and said, 'I want you to build me the very best and don't stop there. I also want to add this, this and this.' I negotiated everything up front."

In some cases, Mr. Mohebbi went against vendor recommendations. In the end, however, he felt he got the best they could offer. "Two years later, several manufacturers came out and said this is the best line they ever built," he said. "They will incorporate many of the things they've done here into their standard design because they see how much better it performs and how it improves the product. We didn't want to be just another bakery. We want to be a great bakery."

Placing a finger on food security

Papa Pita requires fingerprint authorization to gain access to the mixers, proofers, ovens and other systems at its new bakery in West Jordan, UT. If line operators want to change mixing times or temperatures, they need to summon their supervisors — or a person with the designated authority — to make the change.

"Codes can be shared," noted Farzad Mohebbi, president and CEO. "I don't want people just changing the process because they think it needs to be changed."

Both the plant manager and operations manager are alerted when a formula goes beyond its specifications.

Likewise, HMI controls are user-friendly and easy to understand. "It doesn't matter what your cultural background is," noted Bryan Malkin, operations manager. "You can operate these systems because they're based more on symbols than language."



The bakery's versatile line can completely submerge and boil bagels or just apply a waterfall or even bypass the system and steam them.

Take the bakery's Rademaker 48-in.-wide flatbread line installed last year; it can crank out 100,000 round thins per hour. The capacity is so large that the line has a dedicated proofer and Babb tunnel oven and needs two spiral coolers just to handle the volume.

Moreover, Mr. Mohebbi noted, the versatile line can create almost any form of pita, lavash, pizza crust, naan, thin bagel or any other specialty thin bread that becomes the next big thing in the market. How? Of special note, it employs rotary cutters and scrap recycling systems that come both before and after the proofer.

Why's that? "Some products may change shape during the proofing process, and they need to be cut and made up after proofing to obtain the strict consistency our customers want," he said. "And we never know what products we'll need to produce five years from now."

Its bagel line, which features a BakeTek makeup system, started up this May and turns out 30,000 to 40,000 pieces per hour, depending on their size, and it doesn't matter if the customer wants them boiled, steamed or anywhere in between. "We have the ability to completely submerge and boil bagels or just apply a waterfall or even bypass the system and steam them," Mr. Mohebbi said. "Or we can do a combination of any of these."

In the near future, Papa Pita plans to add artisan roll makeup equipment to create a combination line. The move will maximize throughput of the Capway proofer and Babb stone-hearth tunnel oven and allow the bakery to expand its product portfolio for both the retail market, which makes up 75% of its business, and the food-service channel.

Feeding the third Babb oven is the Gemini Bakery Equipment variety bread line, which began production this spring and features a double-pressure board system that can make a full range of high-end specialty breads from 60 to 120 loaves a minute. During *Baking & Snack's*

exclusive visit in June, Papa Pita just began installing an AMF conventional bun line that makes 600 pieces a minute and shares oven space with the bread line.

Speed, capacity and versatility are just part of the bells and whistles built into this bakery. Mr. Mohebbi also invested in sanitary designs and in reducing maintenance, eliminating downtime, increasing food security and adding process controls that will continue to pay benefits in the long run.

Those important little things

In 2008, Mr. Mohebbi told *Baking & Snack* that success for Papa Pita comes down to monitoring, controlling, fixing or improving the little things. As they say, the devil is in the details. (For a history of the company, see *Baking & Snack* of December 2008, available in digital edition at www.bakingbusiness.com.)

Some of those little things are just common sense. Managers, for instance, are located near their areas of responsibility. Corporate offices are in the front, operations in the middle of the bakery and sales in the back near the warehouse and distribution center.

Then again, some of those little things are not that small. Take the bakery's straight-line production flow. "It's almost a dream to have a bakery with wide aisles between lines and totally straight," Mr. Mohebbi said.

Many companies talk the talk about sanitary design. Mr. Mohebbi walks the walk, and that's not a little thing in today's world. "The majority of our lines are, back to front, all stainless and all washdown, and everywhere possible, we used servo motors to avoid chains that can break down," he noted. To minimize spare parts inventory, Papa Pita worked with only a handful of vendors that Mr. Mohebbi personally vetted. He insisted all PLCs, HMIs and electronic controls come from Allen-Bradley. "If I have to change one HMI, I don't want to

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The bakery's flatbread line can crank out up to 100,000 products an hour, but it's also flexible enough to produce pitas, naan, lavash and even pizza crusts.

have 50 different types on the shelf," he explained.

His attention to detail can be seen with even something as prosaic as a proofer. Mr. Mohebbi wanted a proofer that was much bigger and much brighter so that when maintenance personnel needed to make a repair, they could replace or maintain everything as quickly as possible. In the long haul, he said, downtime costs bakeries much more than initial investments. Often, he added, downtime is never considered as a variable when calculating ROI on a major project.

"When your proof box goes down and you have to change something — or if you can't wash it daily or fix it easily — chances are that it will not be washed properly and will not be maintained properly," he said. "Your breakdowns, your downtime and the cost of repairs are many, many, many times more than that incremental cost of running it.

"One of my requests is that I want to walk into my proofers with my sunglasses on and be able to see everything because it's so bright," he said. "Everybody makes their box like it's a dark hole. You go in there, and you can hardly see because the people who designed it never have worked in that box. I wanted to get in, see what's wrong, fix it and get out because it's hot in there."

Inside a brand new bakery

With the opening of the West Jordan, UT, bakery, Papa Pita now employs 200, more than triple the 60 it had two years ago. Production at the bakery runs five days a week with extensive sanitation and preventive mainte-

nance on down days. Spending \$50 on replacing a bearing today can save thousands of dollars in labor and wasted product if the line goes down.

Flour is stored in three silos with 170,000 lb of capacity each and delivered through a Great Western Manufacturing sifter. Papa Pita worked with Horizon Systems to automatically deliver flours and 14 other essential ingredients — ranging from bulk oil and sugar to salt and other minors — that are found in most of the bakery's products, directly to the mixers.

To provide front-end control and eliminate human error, the bakery relies on a Northwind recipe system that monitors all ingredients, provides automatic lot tracking and protects proprietary formulas. There's no under- or over-scaling

here. Only yeast and a few other minor ingredients are added manually. If a supervisor or operator attempts to adjust or change a formula out of spec, an email alert is sent to Will Durrant, plant manager, and Bryan Malkin, operations manager. At the end of the day, the software turns out a report to assist in ingredient costing, purchasing and inventory.

Two Shaffer 2,000-lb open-frame dough mixers can interchangeably supply the flatbread and bagel lines, depending on production flow. Mr. Mohebbi selected the mixers because of their energy efficiency and sanitary design. "They look like Transformers on four big legs that make them easy to wash," he said.

On the Rademaker flatbread line, dough travels out of the mixer and up an inclined conveyor to an extruder and several multiroller reduction stations, a cross roller and gauging stations. After passing through the first rotary cutting station, dough pieces ride along a variable-height bridge that feeds the Rademaker cascading proofer, which automatically adjusts the dough's path of travel according to the required proof times.

For longer proofs, the bridge feeds dough pieces to the top of the proofer. For shorter proofs, the bridge lowers to the middle level or to the bottom for little or no proof. The line can even run a dough sheet through the proofer, and a second set of rotary cutters creates the dough pieces.

Each level of the cascading proofer comes with its own servo motor to adjust its speed. This added feature may seem redundant or over-engineered at first because

many proofers operate with only a few single-drive motors. However, Mr. Mohebbi said he insisted that Rademaker include this feature because it not only provides further control of proofing times but also allows better control of the product's shape during transfer from one layer to another.

The Babb 96-ft, direct-fired oven can reach 1,000°F. The expandable modular oven features a steam chamber, if items need steaming, and an inspection system to monitor color and the size of products.

All of the bakery's IJ White spiral coolers come with clean-in-place systems and belt sanitizers to minimize cross-contamination. A sloped floor beneath the coolers allows foam and water to drain, dramatically reducing cleaning time. "It used to take us 30 to 40 hours to clean them," he said. "Now it's done in 20 minutes."

Flexibility and reliability

The combination bagel and roll makeup line features a five-pocket piston divider that feeds five bagel formers with the pieces dropped via a reciprocating conveyor onto 32-by-48-in. peel boards. An ABB robot with a gantry storage system loads and unloads peel boards.

Once again, the proofer is integral to the line's flexibility. When the peel boards enter the Capway CapStep proofer, they rise upward then transfer to a downward system. According to Mr. Mohebbi, the space-saving system can handle products ranging in height from 1 to 7 in., thus accommodating everything from bagels to bread bowls for soup. Proofing times are also adjustable. "Most companies proof dough within 45 minutes to an hour. Our proofing times are much, much longer," he noted. "Some of them are 50% longer than normal."

After proofing, the bagels enter the water bath and waterfall system,



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Papa Pita's mixers provide energy efficiency and sanitary design. The bakery has three 2,000-lb dough mixers and one 1,300-sponge mixer.

or they can bypass it to create softer steamed bagels. The Babb 100-ft oven features the same options as the one on the flatbread line, except it has stone hearth side walls and a maximum temperature of 700°F.

The variety bread line also provides extensive versatility. Sponges are created in a Shaffer 1,300-lb mixer then receive up to a 4.5-hour ferment in a conventional first-in, first-out fermentation room before entering a third Shaffer 2,000-lb dough mixer.

"One of the things that is important to us is to stay true to our process and not be tempted to cut steps for efficiency and speed," Mr. Mohebbi explained. "Although we run at the highest rates, our process still manages to keep a long natural fermentation that creates good flavor."

The Gemini Bakery Equipment makeup line features a WP Haton single-pocket divider and WP nonstick cone rounder that uses light warm air to round doughs without flour or with a slight dusting of flour or a dab of oil. Dough pieces then travel under two pressure boards that can be combined to produce a wide variety of textured products. A topper between the boards allows seeds and grains to be rolled into the dough pieces as they travel under the second pressure board and are then panned.

After traveling through the CapStep proofer, similar to the bagel line, the pans pass under a Burford seeder and into a Babb 100-ft air-impingement oven. The wash-down oven can reduce bake times by up to 30% while lowering energy usage by 35%. The bakery can control not only bake times and temperatures but also convection velocities and the heat above and below the hearth.

Of special note, Mr. Mohebbi said, is the oven's ability to raise or lower temperature by 150 F° in two minutes, which streamlines changeovers. "We can bake one pan or an oven full of pans without heat flashing," he said. "Every loaf is the same color. This is a huge advantage on a combination [bread and AMF bun line] and reduces waste tremendously."

The empty pans travel on a Capway conveyor through a 50-ft tunnel that cools them from 375°F to about 95°F. Specifically, ambient air blows through the tunnel to remove the heat from the pans. This system provides the necessary cooling as the pans recycle back to the front of the line so as not to shock the dough pieces prior to



entering the proofer. Meanwhile, the warm loaves travel along an IJ White spiral cooler and on to packaging.

At this year's International Baking Industry Exposition, to be held Oct. 6-9 in Las Vegas, Papa Pita will look for additional ways to streamline its packaging operations. Currently, the packaging department features a battery of UBE baggers and slicers and Kwik Lok closure systems. All systems can be washed down, but most of the tray loading and basket stacking remains manual. The bakery also casepacks products for food-service accounts and stores them in a 160-pallet freezer.

In addition to continuous investment, Papa Pita plans to focus on continuous improvement, noted Mr. Malkin, a start-up specialist and expert in lean manufacturing who's worked at multinational corporations throughout his career.

Ramping up the flatbread line, he acknowledged, involved a pretty large learning curve since the old bakery had a lot of rack ovens and was much more manually operated. The bagel and bread lines, however, came online much faster. The next step will involve ongoing training to lower costs further and improve the operations' efficiencies. "We're driving down the idea that every second of operation uptime counts," Mr. Malkin said.

Mr. Mohebbi said he couldn't have completed the project without his key suppliers. "I had one thing in common with all these vendors: They are owned by an individual like me, and their personal relationship commitment to excellence and promise to me was the key factor in choosing them to build my new bakery, and I sense that they are just as proud of the end result as I am," he said.

And, of course, he thanked his management team. "I could not have done this without their tremendous hard work, countless hours of stress and sleepless nights and the dedication and passion they have poured into this two-year project," he said. ●

PAPA PITA BAKERY

A Perfect 10

Papa Pita prints the phrase "To live well is to eat well" on the front of every bag of its branded products.

Depending on the competition, winning five out of 10 times is not bad, seven out of 10 might be considered pretty good and nine out of 10 is often a hot streak.

That's still not enough for Farzad Mohebbi, president and CEO of Papa Pita, West Jordan, UT.

"My goal has been to make a great product at a fair price, and I believe we accomplish that to an *n*th degree at Papa Pita," he explained. "If I take my product to 10 potential customers for cuttings, I want 10 out of 10 to pick my product over my competition. That's a high bar to set. And then, I would like to produce it most efficiently as possible, tack on a fair margin and do my part in getting that in consumers' hands because it's the best product at the best price. That's what sets us apart from the competition."

Papa Pita strives for perfection along with an increasingly diversified product line and geographic expansion that fueled 30 to 50% annual growth during the past five years. About 75% of sales come from retail with the remainder from foodservice. Its products can be found from the Midwest through the Rocky Mountain states and along the West Coast as well as in Alaska and Hawaii. Most of its products are delivered fresh within an 800-mile distance from its bakery via independent distributors, although the company operates its own direct-store-delivery routes in Utah, Nevada and Idaho.

In addition to branded baked goods, the company also produces private label items. Its fundamental strat-

Papa Pita's winning formula involves creating 'healthy made delicious' products at affordable, everyday low prices.

egy involves offering premium products such as its best-selling wide-panned multigrain bread at prices slightly higher than private label but substantially lower than its competitors. All consumers, no matter what their incomes, should have access to quality, better-for-you products that feature whole grains and as clean a label as possible, according to Mr. Mohebbi. That's why Papa Pita places one of its key slogans — "healthy made delicious" — on all of its branded packages.

"I believe what we have is far better than what's out there, and it could meet consumers' demands because people are hungry for a better product at a better price," he said. "If you can create a better Starbucks with a better flavor and 30 to 40% lower prices, I guarantee that you will succeed."

Bubba's, Maya, Great Grains

Founded by Mr. Mohebbi's father 30 years ago, Papa Pita today specializes in flatbreads, tortillas, bagels, variety breads and more.

In addition to its popular pitas, the bakery's flatbread portfolio includes sandwich thins, naan, pizza crusts and lavash in all shapes and sizes under the Papa Pita

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Keeping the bread shelf full

Papa Pita operates 90 company-owned routes in Utah, Las Vegas and Boise, ID. However, the bakery's definition of a route is a little out of the ordinary because its version of direct-store-delivery includes a drop-ship system and teams of merchandisers, according to Dustin Bakker, national sales director.

Going to the merchandiser system reduced the number of trucks the bakery uses by 28, or to about 62 trucks in all. Mr. Bakker estimated the savings to be about \$500 a week on average per truck on operating costs and insurance.

"I'm trying to take the money out of what I'm wasting — I get sick seeing these trucks sitting out there for 15 or 16 hours a day and not being used — and put it to better use," he said.

Farzad Mohebbsi, president and CEO, is proud of what his sales group has accomplished over the past two years. "To go from hardly any shelf space in our market to having half or more of the entire bread set in most major chains is truly amazing," he said.

brand, which sports an image of Mr. Mohebbsi's grandfather as its logo.

When Mr. Mohebbsi joined the family business in 1998, he introduced bagels to Salt Lake City. Selling bagels under the Papa Pita name didn't make sense, so the company began branding them as Bubba's.

Soon afterward, the bakery diversified further, rolling out Maya's tortillas, named after his daughter. It then added Great Grains breads. The company also sells Thinwich flat round breads, Bubba's Skinny bagels and Wrapido Wraps.

Most recently, the company ventured into the sweet goods category by rolling out Bubba's cake donuts, made in Papa's Pita's old bakery in Salt Lake City and packaged per dozen in an overwrapped paperboard tray with a 14-day shelf life. Bubba's is now the company's breakfast brand. Not surprisingly, the line's leading seller is not a traditional chocolate, glazed or powdered sugar donut. It's toasted coconut.

Throughout the years, Papa Pita didn't spend much time on packaging. In fact, the company's products came in clear packaging with a label slapped on them, giving

them what Dustin Bakker, national sales director, called a "small-time bakery look."

"A lot of people laugh about the good ol' days when we had stickers on our bread bags," Mr. Bakker recalled.

During the past two years, Papa Pita worked with Barth Packaging to upgrade its brand to improve its shelf appeal. Scott Barth, the company's president, met with Mr. Mohebbsi to comprehend his approach to the market, then developed packaging that reflected the bakery's vision.

"He came out here for two days and worked until 11 p.m. and around my schedule to understand what's in my head and how to transform our product line," Mr. Mohebbsi said. "He just nailed it perfectly."

The bakery's packaging today is united under four pillars — fiber, whole grain, low-calorie and protein declarations — that support the company's "healthy made delicious" campaign.

The bakery also puts "To live well is to eat well" on the front of every bag. "We believe in that concept," he noted. "We brought all of our brands under one banner and created a type of packaging that informs consumers



of all of the products' health and nutritional attributes."

Each bag also declares "No HFCS. Transfats. Cholesterol." "We threw away all of those things that should not be in bread to begin with," he explained. "We came up with the cleanest label possible that did away with all of those terrible things that are in bread products; 95% of our product is all-natural and doesn't contain a maximum amount of calories. We maximize fiber and whole grains in our products."

On each bag is the Papa Pita guarantee. "If you're not satisfied 100%, you'll get your money back," he added. •

Papa Pita recently upgraded its packaging to better brand its baked goods and promote their "healthy made delicious" image.



BUYING INTO A **VISION**

By Dan Malovany, Editor, Baking&Snack

About a year ago when Reed Jacobs was driving to Papa Pita for a job interview, he began to have second thoughts about the long commute from his home to the bakery's office on the other side of Salt Lake City. In fact, about halfway to the company's headquarters, Mr. Jacobs called his wife and told her he was turning around. Fortunately, he said, she convinced him to keep on driving. Because after interviewing with Farzad Mohebbi, Papa Pita's president and CEO, Mr. Jacobs took the job as the bakery's comptroller. "I was so impressed with his genuineness and straightforwardness," he recalled.

Mr. Jacobs is one of many managers I met at Papa Pita who joined the business after meeting Mr. Mohebbi and buying into his entrepreneurial mission to build the best specialty bakery in the nation. Take Bryan Malkin, who had another job lined up and, in fact, planned to start his new position three days before he interviewed at Papa Pita. "I was sold the second I walked through the door," Mr. Malkin noted. "Farzad's enthusiasm and vision sold me."

Mr. Mohebbi, who owns Papa Pita with his wife, Yolanda, believes in striving for the best and taking nothing less, especially when building his spankin' new 200,000-sq-ft facility. "The vision was creating the most incredible bakery, producing the best product at the best price every day and changing the market dynamics from price escalation and fewer choices by ordering a different product," he said. He relishes being "the odd man out" who has a better product at a price that's affordable to everyone. "No smoke and mirrors," he told me during my visit to his bakery. We don't use gimmicks. We believe what we produce will sell on its own merits."

He calls himself "unorthodox" and negotiates his own deals with suppliers, relying on his engineering background and his experience as "the chief janitor, chief baker and chief distributor" since the company was founded 30 years ago. And he is admittedly a haggler at heart. And forget teams of consultants. "I was told by several of our key vendors that it was a little more than crazy that this one guy — me — thinks he can do it all," he said. At his new bakery, he's invested in sanitary design with wash down capabilities from mixing through packaging. He made sure he purchased a flexible proofer that's easy to clean and simple to maintain. That's because any type of downtime — sanitation or maintenance — on the bakery's new flatbread line that produces 100,000 pieces an hour will cost many times the initial investment in the long run.

But all too often, investing in people and getting them to buy into a vision eventually pay the biggest dividends. "When I was interviewed, I knew this was a good fit immediately," said Nelly Mbogo, office manager. "Papa Pita is a company that cares about its people."







