

An affection for confection

Easter is a time even the most mild-mannered sweet-tooth becomes a raving chocoholic. Alison Aprhys gets a taste

GEOFFRE Magganas says he can't wait to get to work in the morning. It's great because I get to eat chocolate every day to make sure the flavour systems are right," the director of the boutique and award-winning firm Nina's Chocolates says.

Fresh from hearing the news that Nina's, based at Gymer in Sydney's south, won awards for 2004 at Sydney's Royal Easter Show four gold, nine silver and 10 bronze medals, Magganas is bursting with excitement that the company he started as a hobby has received such distinction.

"For 20 years I worked as a food technologist for a multinational food company and chocolate making became a hobby," he says.

"I was very popular with friends, but it was something I thought I would take up seriously in my retirement."

However, when Magganas was made redundant at the relatively young age of 42, he took the plunge, and credits his company's success to his wife of 27 years.

"My lovely wife, May, who is an accountant, encouraged me to give chocolate serious consideration and without her, this business would not have survived," he says. The first few years saw the couple working long hours.

"We really reeled an eight-day of the week," he says. Yet from day one, he felt passionate about making it a success.

Magganas reckons that like many businesses, production and business set-up are relatively simple compared with getting the right staff.

"The biggest task was getting people who are as keen as you are, and I'm proud to say that we have a fabulous team," he says.

"We have 15 employees and we only operate six days a week unless it's festive times — I worked for one minister, don't want to create another."

As CEO of industry group Confectionery Manufacturers of Australasia, David Greenwood is well used to people exclaiming over his role.

"They do go, 'Wow! I want your job,' because it is a *Willy Wonka* fantasy," Greenwood says.

"However, it's all business here, as we are an industry organisation and are very involved in food law, regulations, trade development, environmental issues, government lobbying, public affairs and training."

"We represent everyone from the top end of town, such as Cadbury right down to the artisan who makes a wonderful chocolate by hand in smaller quantities."

Greenwood's advice is to look at various career options: "One way is to get a break and be employed on site by a confectionery company and learn on the job."

"There are also confectionery courses and our preferred supplier is William Angliss (Institute of TAFE, Melbourne).

"The industry is dependent on having skilled people and needs to recruit people who are passionate about the product."



Willy Wonka: Magganas at Nina's Chocolates at Gymer in Sydney's south

Picture: Sam Hoey

LINKS

William Angliss Institute of TAFE
<http://confectionery.angliss.vic.edu.au/industry.htm>
Confectionery Manufacturers of Australasia
www.candy.net.au

ing, packing and logistics as well as retail — in fact with our 11 stores, we employ more people in sales than in manufacturing."

"In the factory we work with the food processing certificate with the confectionery modules developed by the industry with William Angliss, and have had some of those lecturers do in-house, hands on training for us."

"You have to love food and get to be patient and quite good with your hands — all high-quality confectionery has a lot of manual input."

With his brothers David and Mark, John Griswold is a director and founder of Chocolatier Australia, based at Ivarhoe, in Melbourne's east.

"I love 'em all," says John Griswold "I love breaking a well-made Easter egg to eat that delicious, smooth chocolate."

Griswold knows he's typical, as Austral

ians are the highest consumers per capita of Easter eggs in the world.

His company manufactures and distributes hand made European-style chocolates and seasonal chocolate products.

"Our workforce is made up of a lot of different people," he says. "We have a mix of trained and untrained, skilled and unskilled."

"However, where we can we promote from within and we have people who joined us unskilled and who now, through hard work, application and training, perform quite important roles within the business."

Dean Agic of Chococat at the Byron Bay Factory, hires his staff on attitude, not just experience.

"Our philosophy is 'handmade with love in Byron Bay', so we look for people who are kind and loving," he says.

Six years ago, Agic's background in massage and his interest in health saw him start out making "strawberry kisses" (freeze-dried strawberries dipped in dark chocolate) for health stores.

"You can taste the love in our chocolates," he says.

Laurie Tatnell, who previously worked in engineering, and his wife, Maureen, a nurse, decided to become chocolate makers when they retired.

Together they operate Tasmania's Ped-

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Would you refuse to wear a work uniform?

49.78%	No. A uniform saves me money
25.1%	Only if my physical safety was threatened
24.14%	Yes, if it made me a sex object
3.89%	Yes, if it made me look fat

eration Chocolate in Taranna, near Port Arthur, producing 17 different flavours that are sold at Hobart's Salamanca market, Marysville in Victoria, and Relish Tasmania in Sydney.

Currently building a new factory that will include a shop and local history museum the Tatnells, who were trained by the company's previous owners, are delighted with their ongoing success.

"People love our chocolates and it's so rewarding to be your own boss," he says.