

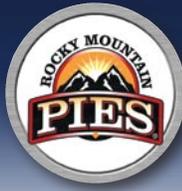
# RFF

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2008 HONOREE: ROCKY MOUNTAIN PIES

# PLAY TO WIN

**Rocky Mountain Pies' recipe for success?  
Delight consumers and deliver what customers want.**

**R**ocky Mountain Pies Founder and President Mark “Par” Grandinetti has a simple business axiom that has served him well for more than 18 years in the pie industry: “Understand the rules and play to win.”

Sure, it sounds like something a high school football coach would tell his athletes before they storm the field — but that’s part of the reason Grandinetti likes it.

“I love it because it really equates to sports for me and it’s motivating,” he says. “If you understand the rules up front, then you can be successful as you work with your customer base.”

Surprisingly, the pie industry and sports have more in common than one might think. While certain basic rules have stayed the same for decades, both competitive areas have seen subtle changes. This is something Grandinetti understood well when he and a group of industry veterans (who worked together at Western Country Pies) started up this Salt Lake City-based frozen pie company in 2007.

“In the last 18 years many of our potential customers consolidated into big corporations that have their own corporate pie programs that



**Handmade touches — such as criss-cross lattices — add pie eye-appeal.**

they have to adhere to and follow,” Grandinetti explains. “And it’s just made this business that much more challenging. So we’ve learned how to play this game.”

And Rocky Mountain plays to win. In its first year of business, the company hit sales of \$10 million and is on pace to double that amount this year.

“Our customer base has doubled, really it’s probably more than doubled, but what really has doubled is our sales volume,” Grandinetti says

He notes that it has been the company’s ability to adapt to its customers’ changing needs and structures that allowed them to grow so quickly.

“Rather than trying to push a program that is a ‘me-too’ program, we prefer to work with customers to build a program that works within the parameters of their market area,” Grandinetti told *Snack Food & Wholesale Bakery* (an *R&FF* sister publication) earlier this year.

This could include developing a specialty pie or pre-labeled product for private label sale or creating a trans-fat-free option — all of which Rocky Mountain has done in the last year — among other things. There are few limits — the company now offers more than 300 different pies including fruit, meringue and cream-based pies in several different sizes.

Despite the large variety, Grandinetti ensures that these pies all have at



COVER FEATURE  
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2008 HONOREE: ROCKY MOUNTAIN PIES

Rocky Mountain Pies offers more than 300 pie varieties.



least a few things in common — a homemade appearance and amazing taste.

“Our goal for our customers is to stop the shopping cart at the pie display in the bakery, because you can ‘eat the product with your eyes,’ and then once they take the pie home and eat it, we’ve got them,” he says. “And you get them to stop the shopping cart by doing the extra little touches.”

At Rocky Mountain these “extra touches” include hand-placed lattice tops on fruit pies and hand-peaked meringues on the company’s top-selling meringue pies. While it operates a modern, fully-equipped 75,000-square-foot Salt Lake City production plant (see Inside the Plant, p. 23), Rocky Mountain doesn’t mind taking the time for these “handmade” touches.

Grandinetti notes, “We’re happy to run the pies at that speed and provide a better product. That’s kind of our signature, our niche.”

Looking ahead, growth also is proving to be a signature of this company. Grandinetti already

has several new endeavors for 2009 lined up that he says will double sales for the third year in a row.

“I want to continue down the path we’re on and reach \$50 million in sales in the next five years,” he says.

Not that the path is easy. Rocky Mountain Pies’ first two years of business coincided with unprecedented increases in commodity prices. Grandinetti adds that it was a year where even the company leaders had to sort out their roles.

“When we first launched this new business, we were all wearing so many hats, it was very difficult to accomplish everything that needed to be done,” he says. Still, Rocky Mountain Pies posted a profitable summer.

And it’s here that Grandinetti keeps it simple, once again, as he sums up the company’s future plans: “We will continue to stick to our business plan, produce the finest quality products at a fair price and enable our customers to grow their pie category and shower them with great service.” **RFF**

## FAST FACTS ROCKY MOUNTAIN PIES

**Location:**

Salt Lake City, Utah

**Top executive:** Mark (Par) Grandinetti, president

**Founded:** 2007

**Annual sales:** \$10 million (in 2007)

**Primary product(s):** Frozen cream, meringue, fruit and other dessert pies

**Brands:** Rocky Mountain Pies, private label

**Distribution:** Nationwide to supermarkets for retail and in-store bakery sales

**On the Web:**

[www.rockymountainpies.com](http://www.rockymountainpies.com)

## Home sweet home

Rocky Mountain Pies executives feel at home again in the company's Salt Lake City pie plant.



Lattice-topped pies are a signature product at Rocky Mountain Pies.

**AT A GLANCE**

- Company:** Rocky Mountain Pies
- Location:** Salt Lake City, Utah
- Products:** Frozen baked cream, meringue, fruit and other dessert pies
- Plant size:** 75,000 square feet
- Number of employees:** 75
- Number of lines:** Two full lines and two utility lines
- Vice president of manufacturing:** Doyle Converse

By Dan Malovany

*Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the March 2008 Snack Food & Wholesale Bakery issue. Dan Malovany is SF&WB's editor*

For Mark (Par) Grandinetti and Doyle Converse, it was like déjà vu all over again. Since the 1990s, the two had worked at Western Country Pies, the Salt Lake City bakery that was their base for more than a decade before it shut down in 2004.

Less than three years later, in 2007, their new company, Rocky Mountain Pies, fired up production in the same facility, which was a shell of a building when they took it over. Today, the plant houses two lines that crank out a variety of cream, meringue, seasonal and fruit pies. Cur-

rently, 75 production workers — many of whom worked for Western Country Pies — operate on a single shift, producing an average of 25,000 to 30,000 pies a day.

Grandinetti, president, and Converse, the company's vice president of manufacturing, expect to add another shift during the second half of this year. This move will reunite them with dozens more of the former co-workers who have expressed interest in coming back to the baking industry.

“With the exception of about five employees, all of the rest of them have been with us at least five years, and some of them have been with us for at least 20 years,” Grandinetti says, going back to when he and others cut their teeth in the pie industry by operating Marie Callendar Restaurant and Bakery franchises in the 1980s.

In many ways, the latest startup of the plant is almost a Goldilocks story for Grandinetti, Converse and the others who returned. At 75,000 square feet, the bakery is not too big and not too small.

Instead, Grandinetti describes the operation as just about right for an upstart company that established itself as a niche player in the pie category during its first year in existence and has doubled its business in its second year of operation. At full capacity, the bakery could crank out upward of 100,000 pies over three shifts. There also is room to add a third production line.

“We built this plant to grow by pressure,” he explains. “We didn't build this big, 700,000-square-foot mausoleum that we have to fill up. We can go up and down real quick without huge overhead to maintain.”

### Pies on the line

Production runs on one shift, five days a week, except during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday seasons, when the plant ramps up to full throttle.

Ingredients and packaging, Doyle notes, are stored next door in a building that once housed production lines and warehousing for Western Country Pies. Each morning, plant workers bring over ingredients and materials that are needed to fulfill the day's production schedule.

Pastry dough is mixed in a 700-pound double-arm mixer. Shells are baked upside down and between two pie tins in a revolving tray oven for about 35 minutes to reduce shrinkage caused by the high fat content. Volumes range from about 8,000 to 10,000 shells a day.

Bases, fillings and toppings are created in 300-gallon kettles located on a mezzanine floor. Fillings are made using

a combination of slurry and individually quick frozen fruit.

The cream line can produce up to 35 pies a minute, depending on how complicated the product is to assemble. The fruit pie line can make up to 100 pumpkin pies a minute.

On the cream line, coconut base is initially deposited, followed by a full layer of whipped cream rosettes, and then finished with a second layer of whipped cream rosettes in the center of the pie. All of the depositors work simultaneously as the pie tins travel single-file down the line. At the end of the line, an employee visually inspects the pies and adds extra slices of decorative coconut. This hand application provides a bit of a homemade look to the product — a Rocky Mountain signature. The cream line also produces meringue pies.

On the fruit line, the pastry dough is hand-loaded into a hopper. After traveling through a roller former that shapes the dough into a brick, the flour-dusted pieces enter a reduction station where two sets of rollers flatten the dough into a thin, round piece. Three-spout depositors then drop the fruit filling into every other pie shell. The depositor hopper is located no more than 10 feet from the line to minimize damaging the fruit.

Down the line, bakers hand-apply the lattice in a criss-cross pattern. The fruit pies then receive a sugar-water glaze for browning and some final hand-crimping before lining up, 12 across, and being automatically loaded into the 85-foot direct-fired oven.

After unloading, the pies are placed into plastic trays and stacked up to 15 high for cooling. They're stored in a 15,000-square-foot blast freezer until

Cherry pies bake in the Salt Lake City plant's 85-foot oven.





**ROCKY MOUNTAIN  
PIES**  
Rocky Mountain Pies  
Salt Lake City, UT  
Left to right:  
*Kris Burt*, VP Finance  
*David Park*, VP Purchasing  
*Mark (Par) Grandinetti*, President  
*Doyle Converse*, VP Production

the products reach 30°F, before being packaged in plastic trays with elegant black bottoms and clear plastic tops. Two labels are adhered to the packages. The bottom contains the Nutrition Facts panel and other production-related information. The top may include a Rocky Mountain Pies label or one from an in-store bakery's brand. The

products are casepacked, palletized and shrink-wrapped before being stored in the bakery's 500-pallet freezer or shipped to offsite storage.

### Looking ahead

Over the next year or so, the bakery plans to add a spiral freezing system to streamline production efficiencies. Rocky Mountain Pies also plans to install more revolving tray ovens as demand for pastry shells increases.

In the short run, the strategy is to get the second shift on board to meet anticipated demand for capacity including a co-packing arrangement on slate for 2009, as well as for strictly practical reasons, including maximizing oven time and enhancing the utilization rates of the make-up equipment. **RFF**



Cherry filling is automatically deposited into pie crusts.

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