

EXPANSION AND RENEWAL CAJUN STYLE

Stressed by demand, Langlinais Baking adds to processing capacity, expands its building and sets the business on its path to the future.

Excerpt from Baking & Snack April 2007



Family owned and operated from the start, Langlinais Baking relies on the bakery and management skills of (from left) Jeff Foret, production supervisor, Bobby Langlinais, president and owner, Colby and Robbie Langlinais, general managers

Hurricane Katrina changed lives and businesses throughout the Gulf Coast in 2005. Langlinais Baking Co., located at Lafayette, LA, 40 miles inland and 25 ft above sea level experienced no damage, yet that storm, along with Hurricane Rita a few weeks later, irreversibly altered the course of this business.

We had an immediate 45% increase after Katrina," said bakery owner, Robert (Bobby) Langlinais. Customers who normally relied on New Orleans bakeries for their French bread and rolls came knocking on his door. Mr. Langlinais estimated recently that current business remains 25% ahead of pre-storm levels. "Many of those post-Katrina customers stayed with us," he observed.

Aftermath. But the additional demand came with consequences. Sending more baked foods out the door required more production hours inside the plant. Soon, the schedule stretched to engulf every hour of the day.

The 24/7 schedule not only accelerated the wear-and-tear on equipment but also raised the stress level for personnel.

Just finding people to work in the bakery was difficult. Lafayette's unemployment rate is a mere 2.5%, among the lowest in the nation. "So, all of us are having problems finding staff," Mr. Langlinais observed.

He had an additional concern. Since its first days, Mr. Langlinais ran the bakery as a sole proprietorship, but recently his two oldest sons joined the company. However, he wondered, could he reorganize bakery operations to ensure the company's vitality into the next generation.

The more he visited and studied comparable bakeries around the country, the more he realized that a single-shift, 12-hour operation would be best.

More automation — especially systems capable of versatility — would be a big part of the solution. In 2006, he began a \$1 million expansion. The company added 3,000 sq ft to its building, thus bringing 30,000 sq ft under roof. It installed another computerized production line, and it put in three more "double double" rack ovens, boosting capacity 50%.

"We just couldn't continue to work the way we were," Mr. Langlinais stated. Nine months later, operating schedules have stabilized, and running conditions no longer push red-line limits for the humans as well as the machines. "Now, we're doing one 12-hour shift, and all the managers are in at the same time.



Langlinais Baking Company, Inc.

Original, Authentic. Positioning itself as a baker of "original New Orleans French bread," Langlinais Baking specializes in hearth-baked products, particularly the items that characterize New Orleans and Cajun cuisine. Its French bread poboys rolls, in lengths of 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 24 in., and pistollette buns supply sandwich shops throughout the region and are shipped frozen in parbaked and fully baked form to numerous food service outlets through institutional distributors. It also bakes the round Sicilian-heritage roll used for the region's signature muffuletta sandwiches. These come in three diameters: 5 inch, 9 inch and the newest, 2 inch "cocktail" size.

Over the years, bakery operations expanded. It soon moved out of the grocery store kitchen into 3,000 sq ft in an office building that the family owned on the same site.

Over the years, the bakery has added on five times until it now has 30,000 sq ft and completely fills the city block. Bobby Langlinais has credited much of his company's success to the many contacts he's made in the baking industry and its allied trades. "Really, it's a lot of networking that's built the business", he said.

Going shopping. Already set up with a computerized artisan bread system to run long, or string products and a productive line for small rolls, the next step would be to automate poboys and muffuletta rolls in particular. Knowing that his bakery needed additional processing equipment, Mr. Langlinais set his sights on finding the right system.

"We need equipment that is versatile," he explained about the recent expansion. "We need the machines to be able to run everything we do. For example, we prefer to mould individual items rather than cutting long strings of dough into short pieces. Dough pieces for the items range in weight from 1 to 14 oz, and we determined that Gemini's CraftMaster system would fit the bill."

Before authorizing shipment of the new line, Mr. Langlinais and his staff tested it on-site at the Gemini facility in Philadelphia, PA. The bakery has a long history with this supplier. Mr. Langlinais bought his first production line from Gemini in 1977 right after the last Baking Expo held at Atlantic City, NJ.

The new CraftMaster low-stress line supplied by Gemini Bakery Equipment Company immediately earned productivity gains for the bakery. For example, its 9-in. muffuletta boules were previously formed by hand, 20 per minute. Now they run on the computer-sequenced line at 70 a minute.

"Muffuletta buns are a big part of our business," Mr. Langlinais said.

"We used to interrupt products a lot," Mr. Langlinais said, earning a sympathetic groan from son Robbie, one of the bakery's general managers. "The jumping back and forth is something we did not want to do anymore. Changeovers are down to six to 10 minutes, max, and we try to schedule these only twice a day."

Distribution, however, sometimes complicates schedules. "We play 'beat the truck' a lot," Mr. Langlinais noted. A number of his customers use shippers who practice backhaul techniques to maximize efficiency. Sometimes, the only notice the bakery gets is a phone call that the truck is on its way. Fast changeovers allow the bakery staff to quickly reorganize schedules.

Three doughs, plus. With a few exceptions, the bakery uses just three different dough formulations to make all its products. Whole wheat is another choice offered to customers. Given sufficient quantity, the bakery will tailor its products and work with different formulations, but Bobby Langlinais prefers to limit the number of product variations and, thus, changeovers.

Muffuletta production starts with dividing the bulk dough through the Gemini Werner & Pfleiderer TWL divider/shaper that heads up the Gemini CraftMaster line. It creates specific dough shapes that are delivered to the sheeting and shaping line. The muffuletta requires the system to produce an evenly sheeted and shaped round dough piece.

Langlinais Baking equipped its CraftMaster with sheeting rollers, pressure boards and curling chains to handle a broad array of 5-, 8-, 10- and 12-in. poboys, as well as the muffuletta and dinner roll shapes. Because of this diverse range, the company selected a reciprocating loader to drop products onto waiting pans and screens.



Today, 9-in. muffuletta boules run through the computerized shaping line at 70 per minute.



Muffuletta boules cool on the same racks on which they are baked, ready for packaging and distribution to a wide variety of food service and institutional customers, local and national.

After panning, the dough pieces pass under a Gemini/ABI seeder/depositor for a topping of sesame or other seeds.

Schedules provide a minimum proofing time of 1 hour, 15 minutes. Mr. Langlinais attributed his bread's light,

airy interior to the long proof. Oven heating profiles guarantee the bread's golden-brown, crackly, paper-thin crust.

The new packaging line automatically stacks buns before bagging. A slicing system can be engaged for slicing buns when customers require.



Langlinais Baking produces par-baked and fully baked items simultaneously, but the distinctively colored crusts make them easy to differentiate. Packaged

and placed in shipping cartons, the bread moves to the distribution dock. A previous expansion put a roof over this area, enclosing the flour silo, too.

