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## GREAT BUNS BAKERY

### Happy 28th Anniversary



Buon Ferragosto  
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# GREAT BUNS

## BAKING IN THE DESERT SUN

By John V. Donovan

This was to be a story about great bread, buns, and rolls. It's not. It should be a story about the reopening of a great Las Vegas bakery that was burned to the ground in a devastating fire. It's not. It should be about bleeding edge technology that can emulate the climate in San Francisco in the middle of the desert to create fantastic sourdough bread. It's not.

This is a much bigger story. It's about what's right with the world and what's wrong with it. It's about core values, family and culture, versus the pursuit of the almighty dollar, yen and euro....at any cost.

In a world that seems to have gone off the deep end, when newspaper headlines in Las Vegas proclaim, "Profits Over Patients", while we watch day after day oil gushing from the bottom of the Gulf and worry if our cars' accelerators are going to stick, we need to know, to be reminded, that there are still those like the Madonia family. Anthony Sr., CEO, Tony Jr.,



looking the massive operations below, no one would ever guess that 95% of their multi million-dollar business revenue was driven by sales to major Vegas hotels, resorts, and restaurant chains. Tony Sr., his wife Lynn and Tony Jr. are completely engaged



VP and General Manager and Lynn, Secretary and Treasurer, owners of Great Buns Bakery, that come to work every day. The bakery operates 365 days per year, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week and is driven by a commitment to 100% total quality and dedication to customer satisfaction.

Spend just two hours with them and you'll learn more about core business values than two years at Harvard Business School. They make success appear to be so simple, but in the world of high volume baking, simple is not easy, it is one very complex business. Making one small dinner roll or one loaf of bread perfectly is perhaps no big deal. Making tens of thousands of them is a very big deal. And when you consider they produce over a thousand different products, the word simple just doesn't seem appropriate.

From the conversation taking place in their conference room over-

with each other in conversation, as if around the family dinner table, discussing their small retail business and their walk-in customers. Some of these regulars have been coming here for over twenty years and others from throughout the country and from around the world put this bakery on a list of must visit attractions like seeing Cirque du Soleil. They know many by first name, they know when there's an illness in their family, and they even make a house call on a senior citizen who hasn't been seen for a few days, just to see if he's ok.

For Las Vegans and many that visit here on vacation or business, this retail operation is a jewel, a hidden gem, a sensory overload of eclectic products; buns, rolls, bagels, artisan breads, sourdough, cakes, and pastries. While some products on supermarket shelves have been there for days, a special section is dedicated to

bags of Great Buns' day old products that sell for peanuts and would pass the freshness taste of even the most sophisticated palate.

But for the Madonias, while trucks are continually leaving their 24/7 operation delivering fresh out-of-the-oven products that will find their way to the buffets, restaurants and sandwich shops of Las Vegas, this small retail outlet is the soul of their business. It could not exist without it. It's their direct connection to the community that they love to serve with a passion. It started in Sicily with Tony Jr's great grandfather, continued with his grandfather who opened a bakery in Buffalo NY, moved it to Las Vegas where it's now operated by the father and son team.

rebuild, they got to work re-engineering the entire operation. And what an operation it is.

A bakery is a manufacturing plant. It falls into the branch of manufacturing called 'process' that works off of recipes and formulas. Unlike its counterpart, 'discrete' manufacturing, that works from a 'bill of materials,' a finished product cannot be returned to its original components. Once you bake a loaf of sourdough bread, that's it, you can't take it apart and regain the yeast, flour, salt, and water.

After World War II, an American Engineer, Edward Deming, taught the Japanese a lesson that would take Americans 20 years to learn: you can't engineer quality into a product after it has been manufactured. It's too late.

Tony Sr. and Jr. fully understand this and use total quality as a strategic marketing tool. They have designed and built processes and systems (a combination of Hardware, Software and Humanware\*) that insure that every step of the complex baking process is done to 100% perfection. If you can attain this level of quality, there is no need to inspect the final product, each product will be perfect.

If this doesn't sound easy, it's not. And the enemy of quality is variability. Everything must be the same, done the same, the same way each and every time. In baking, just as in semiconductor manufacturing, humans are notorious for injecting variability into processes. The answer is fully automated equipment.



To a young child, the view from the office walkway overlooking the fascinating and animated operations below could easily conjure up thoughts of Willy Wonka's factory. But Tony Sr. and Jr. know very well that this is no movie set. After a heart wrenching and devastating fire that completely destroyed their business three years ago, and after planting a sign in the rubble affirming their commitment to

This new automated plant fits the needs of their customers perfectly. And that's how the Madonias always think about their business, from the perspective of their customers. Some will order thousands of rolls or hundreds of loaves of bread while others only a few dozen. Some want them to bake from their own 'build,' their own recipe. This plant is flexible enough

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to do it all. Yet here and there, tucked between the large ovens, proofers and two story cooling column, you'll find a single worker making a few pastries by hand, working on a very short run or perhaps performing some R&D for new products.

The fire instilled in them another passion: create redundant back up systems and then create redundant back up systems to back up the back up systems. Tony Jr. can hardly contain himself when he points out not one, two, but three large air compressors mounted on a wall high about the shop floor. If one were to fail, they would take it

off line, send it out for repair, or order a replacement. In the meantime, there are two more just humming along.

At a time when we seem to have been cast adrift by once trusted name brands and individuals, it's comforting and refreshing to focus on those, like the Madonia family, who continue to deliver quality day in and day out, and where an individual is still thought of as being important and valued customer.

Great Buns Bakery and retail store is located at 3270 East Tropicana, Las Vegas, NV 89121. Phone is 702-898-0311 and their website is [www.greatbunsbakery.net](http://www.greatbunsbakery.net). Store hours are Monday – Friday, 7:00AM to 5:00PM

\*Masaaki Imai -Kaizen

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