

Local entrepreneur buys pizza company

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Mama Bosso Pizza now is in the hands of a new owner who has some extra-large ideas for his new food brands company.

American Food Styles LLC, headed by Scott Florence of Bettendorf, has acquired the assets of RCM Smith Inc., the manufacturer of Mama Bosso Pizza. But the west Rock Island pizza company is only the beginning for Florence and his new startup.

“I have a broader vision and dream to acquire more food companies,” said Florence, the former president and chief executive officer of Hill & Valley Bakery, also in Rock Island. Under American Food Styles, he plans to purchase or consult with other authentic food companies.

“Mama Bosso Pizza is a regional pizza brand that has a great opportunity for growth,” he said. “Ninety-five percent of Americans eat pizza once a week, and frozen pizza is especially popular here in the upper Midwest.”

Acquired from Randy and Christine Smith, Mama Bosso is Florence’s first acquisition, but he said “My passion is to do more of it.”

Details of the acquisition were not disclosed.

His goal is to have a full line of menu items — Italian and other ethnic varieties — to make the company more competitive against major food manufacturers.

Florence said he began his venture with Mama Bosso because of its size and successful track record. “I didn’t want to buy something the first time that was so complicated,” he said, adding that he is not interested in turnaround companies. “This is small, in my hometown and hopefully American Food Styles will get a reputation as a good home for other food businesses.”

Florence said he wants to focus on foods that are healthy, made from fresh foods and have authentic styles, not processed. With Mama Bosso, the company has “the opportunity to develop a niche pizza that the dominant manufacturers cannot imitate. The dough is made fresh daily, is allowed to rise overnight, and then the sauce, cheese and toppings are added by hand.”

While he does plan changes, including some new equipment, packaging and flavors, Florence said he will retain the original recipe. He also plans to triple Mama Bosso’s 12-person staff to 36 over the next two years.

But the goal is to grow the business and eventually “get it to be ready for another buyer. But that is very long-term — that’s a 10-year plan,” he said.

Part of the growth will come from expanding to new geographic markets. Currently, the pizzas are sold in grocery stores from the Quad-Cities to Iowa City/Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.

“We want to continue west and south and north — away from Chicago,” he said.

The company traces its roots to downtown Moline, where Mama Bosso was a restaurant and a bar that became one of the first Quad-City establishments to offer pizza. The restaurant closed in 1986, but the pizza has continued to be sold frozen through local outlets.

Florence credited the Smiths with being “wonderful stewards of the Mama Bosso legacy.”

The new venture has put Florence on a new side of an acquisition. He was leading the family-owned Hill & Valley, the former Nancy’s Pies, when it was purchased by outside investors. He remained there through the transition with a small minority share, which he maintains today.

From that experience, he saw what a sale can do. “It’s very emotional to sell a business both for the owners and employees,” he said. “I knew I could do can do this better which is why American Food Styles is going to be a better home (for other food companies).”