



Gondola Macaroni Products does not ship pasta, because at this point the company has its hands full with Western New York. There may be room for expansion, but right now Gondola is selling all it can make. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

At Gondola Macaroni Products, family is an important ingredient to success

By [Andrew Z. Galarneau](#) | Published October 2, 2018 | Updated October 2, 2018

The story of how West Side pasta company Gondola Macaroni Products reached its 60th anniversary has its roots in a family tree. Last year, Wendy Colla-Bianco and her husband, John Bianco, sold Gondola ravioli, tortellini, shells and other pasta, made in their Niagara Street store six days a week, to restaurants, stores and families. It added up to about 200,000 pounds – 100 tons of noodles. That’s the exclamation point on a story that begins in 1955, when Guido Colla immigrated to Buffalo from Possagno, Italy. The next year, he sent for his wife, Maria, and their three children.

Guido worked as a machinist for Gioia Pasta, but in his spare time he and Maria started a home-based pasta business, starting with ravioli. In 1967, the Collas bought 1985 Niagara St., the former Black Rock Pharmacy, after a fire damaged the building. They rebuilt the structure, and bought some pasta-making machines, while Guido built others. Guido Colla died in 1985. In 1995, the last Gioia pasta machinery was sold at auction and shipped out of town, but Guido’s machines kept going.

To this day, Gondola uses some of his equipment. John Bianco is the mechanical troubleshooter now, keeping some of Guido’s gear working. With Wendy, her mother and three employees, Gondola keeps going.



A photo of Gondola Macaroni Products founders Guido and Maria Colla making tortellini. The photo remains at the Niagara Street store.

With pasta in production six days a week, customers can stop by to see what’s fresh, or pick up frozen or dried varieties. Ravioli stuffed with ricotta and four other cheeses are the biggest seller, offered with and without mint. Meat, spinach and cheese, and lobster ravioli are also standards. Tortellini comes in meat and cheese. Dried pasta comes in 10 varieties, including squid ink, hot pepper, garlic and parsley, and egg. Gondola also sells fresh pasta, in orders of as little as a pound, for customers who order ahead of time, Bianco said.

Dozens of restaurants use Gondola products. “Their raviolis are great for frying,” Tappo chef Phil Limina said. “I do a fried ravioli with a red pepper and fontina dip. The hardest hitter is the pasta and clams I make with their egg noodle fettucine, instead of linguine.” It comes in a dried nest, but it is “the best dried pasta I’ve ever had,” he said. “It eats like a fresh pasta.”



Truffle pasta made with Gondola egg noodles, tossed with crispy prosciutto, wild mushrooms, caramelized shallots and rapini in a sherry mascarpone cream sauce at Tappo. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Limina said the company’s convenience and service make using Gondola a simple decision. “If I need something, it’s right there, I can just go get it,” he said. Plus, he can put Tappo’s “money back into the local economy, which is humongous for me.”

The company’s busiest times are holidays, when other families’ traditions bring them back. They’ve already started stockpiling frozen pasta for Christmas “because the line’s going to be going out the door,” Colla-Bianco said. “We’re very, very busy during holidays.” Lots of expats take their pasta home, she said, bringing Gondola on the plane back to Florida or elsewhere. Gondola does not ship pasta, because at this point the company has its hands full with Western New York. There may be room for expansion, but right now Gondola is selling all it can make.



Tortellini being made at Gondola Macaroni Products. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Every batch of tortellini starts with eggs, flour and water being stirred into dough before it’s run through a vacuum extruder that Guido built. It uses vacuum pressure to extrude it in a 6-inch pasta ribbon, gathered on a roller. The roller is transferred to a tortellini machine, which pinches off filled pasta shapes and drops them into a waiting tray.

All of the macaroni made at 1985 Niagara St. makes its way through the process in screen-bottomed wooden trays hand-carried from machine to drying cabinet to the packaging table.

The hands that made those boxes are those of Colla-Bianco’s father and grandfather. One day, her 10-month-old daughter, Kendall – whose portable crib is tucked in a corner near the table Colla-Bianco’s mother, Sharon, still uses to fill pasta shells one at a time – might become the fourth generation of her family to feed Buffalo families.



John Bianco with daughter Kendall Bianco, wife, Wendy Bianco-Colla, and her mother, Sharon Colla. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Across the room is the sauce cauldron, where Gondola's tomato sauce is prepared. The pot has a geared mechanism, rigged by Guido and fixed by Bianco, turning a paddle so the sauce doesn't burn. "I wish my grandfather was still around to help," Colla-Bianco said. "But my husband is a very handy guy. That helps." He keeps the machinery moving with some expert repair assistance. He also drives the Gondola truck on its delivery route, which has overflowed from Thursdays to include some Fridays because of volume.

Today, with help, it's a different story, but Colla-Bianco did the heavy lifting for years, regularly hoisting 50-pound sacks of pasta flour and 60-pound buckets of cheese. Before her full-time pasta career, she was in the U.S. Army for three years. "This is harder," she said. "It never stops, and you go all day."

Right now, the Gondola owners face a good problem: "We have so many customers, we can't keep up with them," Bianco said. "Last year, when she was having the baby, people were asking for 30 cases of cheese ravioli; we could only give them 10."



Some pasta products for sale in the lobby of Gondola Macaroni Products. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Increasing their work week to seven days isn't an attractive option.

“If you have all this money, when are you going to spend it if you're here all the time?” Bianco said. Volume does slow down in warmer weather, but slow now is what busy season used to be like. That's what you get when you sell 100 tons of pasta a year, but still have mom filling shells by hand. “We're in the middle,” Colla-Bianco said. “We're not a big huge company, but we're not making it totally by hand. That's what we do here.”

Where to find Gondola

Besides the store, the company's pasta is sold at Federal Meats locations, Niagara County Produce, Lexington and East Aurora co-ops, Omega Delis, independently operated Tops Markets, Caruso's Italian Imports and Johnny's Meats on Hertel Avenue, Guercio & Sons, Hanzilian's Sausage, DeCamillo bakeries, Pellicano's Marketplace, Louie's Deli & Imports in Clarence, Market in the Square in West Seneca, Sloan Super Market and Grand Island's Island Deli.