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of ONTARIO



unico primo
pentola
d'oro

2017

Diego Cusano
FANTASY RESEARCHER





UNICO PRIMO PENTOLA D'ORO 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	A letter from Canada's Ambassador to Italy, Alexandra Bugailiskis
3	A letter from Italy's Ambassador to Canada, Claudio Taffuri
7	A letter from Vaughan Mayor, Maurizio Bevilacqua
8	A welcome from ICCO Presidents Pat Pelliccione and Tony Altomare
9	ICCO Board of Directors and Staff
10	An interview with ICCO Executive Director, Corrado Paina
13	A letter from John Porco, COO of Unico Inc. and Primo Foods – Pentola d'Oro Title Sponsor
17	Evening Menu
19	An interview with Italy's Consul General in Toronto, Giuseppe Pastorelli
20	An interview with the Italian Trade Commissioner to Canada, Matteo Picariello
23	An interview with the Director of the Italian Institute of Culture, Alessandro Ruggera
25	An interview with the Toronto Coordinator of the Italian National Tourist Board, Mauro Giacobbe
27	ICCO Unico Primo Pentola d'Oro Award Winners - <i>Jan K. Overweel Ltd. Pentola d'Oro Award: Vince Scorniaenchi – Fortinos</i> - <i>City of Vaughan Italy-Canada Award: Pietro Nenci - Costco</i> - <i>City of Toronto Favourite Hotspot Award: Noce Restaurant</i>

ALEXANDRA BUGAILISKIS

Ambassador of Canada to Italy



“
My team looks forward to
continue to work with small and
medium size companies.”

There has never been a more exciting time for the Canada-Italy relationship! Starting right at the top, Italy is successfully managing the most ambitious G7 Presidency in history. In 2018, Canada will assume the G7 Presidency and we aim to continue the admirable work of our Italian friends: to build a safe, tolerant and prosperous world together!

Of course, on September 21, 2017 the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU (CETA) came into force. This is the most wide ranging trade agreement ever created. My team looks forward to continue to work with small and medium size companies to expand trade and investment between our two countries.

Nowhere are the opportunities of the CETA more evident than in the food sector. Tariffs for hundreds of specialty Canadian and Italian foodstuffs have dropped to zero. This will allow Canadian and Italian excellence and innovation in food to truly flourish!

Et nous voici à la “Pentola d’Oro”. Je voudrais féliciter les gagnants qui sont la preuve concrète de l’exquise fusion de ce que le Canada et l’Italie ont de mieux à offrir. Mes remerciements vont en particulier à l’ICCO pour avoir créé cette merveilleuse plateforme pour la créativité et la qualité alimentaires.

En tant qu’Ambassadeur nouvellement désigné auprès de la République italienne, mon défi est celui de renforcer encore plus ce lien précieux. Avec des partenaires comme l’ambassade d’Italie au Canada et l’ICCO, cet objectif sera non seulement réalisable mais un vrai bonheur.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Bugailiskis'.

Alexandra Bugailiskis
Ambassador

CLAUDIO TAFFURI

Ambassador of Italy to Canada



“
Con i miei migliori auguri a tutti
di sempre maggiore successo e
di benessere personale
”

I would like to offer my best wishes for this evening's Gala and to express my personal appreciation to the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario for its Pentola d'Oro Awards initiative recognizing Italian excellence in the Food & Beverage sector in Ontario. Complimenti e auguri!

Besides being a much-awaited and unmissable date in the calendar of Italian business community of Toronto, this event is a key opportunity to network and exchange ideas and outlooks with entrepreneurs, industry professionals, and investors in the food and beverage sector.

From the beginning of my mandate in Canada, just over six months ago, I have seen time and again how this country is a great friend, partner and ally, one with which we share values, traditions, and outlooks. The strength of these ties was amply demonstrated this year by the intensity and frequency of bilateral visits, among them Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to Italy last May, and the visit to Canada in June of the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella. To further anchor this relationship, Canada is home to one of the most vital, active, connected, and influential business communities of Italian descent in the world. And this is not surprising, for this country offers a wealth of opportunity. It is a land where talent and commitment lead to absolute excellence – a fact that is confirmed daily by the many successful Italian companies in Canada. This is even more true here, in the Province of Ontario, and in the city of Toronto, where over half a million Italian-Canadians live and prosper.

This is an especially promising moment in economic relations between Canada and Italy, particularly for Italy's agrifood industry, following the signature of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the European Union and Canada. The Agreement is a historic achievement, and it will produce very important results for our respective economies. It has the distinction of being the first trade agreement between the EU and a major world economy and is the most far-reaching bilateral trade agreement negotiated to date. In the agrifood sector for example, CETA envisages the elimination by Canada of 90.9% of the duties on agricultural tariffs. It also introduces the recognition of 145 Geographical Indications, 41 of which are Italian and among the most significant in export terms. This will make a real economic difference for Italian producers of these products, and in particular will benefit the small and medium-sized companies in this field.

CETA represents an excellent outcome of significant economic value to European and Canadian companies, consumers, and households. It is a great success, one that will further enhance not only the excellent relations between Canada and Europe, but those between Canada and Italy as well, which are of extraordinary importance.

Allow me in closing to offer my warmest congratulations to the four Pentola d'Oro Award recipients. You are outstanding examples of the committed, talented, and hard-working businesspeople in the agrifood sector. Italy is proud of you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claudio Taffuri". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Claudio Taffuri
Ambassador



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MAURIZIO BEVILACQUA

Mayor, City of Vaughan



On behalf of the City of Vaughan, I am pleased to welcome everyone attending the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario's Unico Primo Pentola d'Oro Awards Gala.

It is an honour to host this special event for the first time in Vaughan, as it brings the business community together to celebrate the dynamic Italian food and beverage industry in Ontario. It is an opportunity to recognize the contribution of many individuals whose culinary passion fuels innovation and advancement in the sector.

For the second year in a row, we are proud to sponsor the City of Vaughan Italy-Canada Award. It is given to Canadian or Italian companies that have excelled in business and cultural relations between Italy and Canada, and invested in the promotion and development of Italian food in both countries. I am pleased to extend my sincere congratulations to the recipient of this year's award, Pietro Nenci, Vice-President of Eastern Canada Food and Sundries, Costco Wholesale Canada Ltd.

It is important to celebrate the achievements of individuals and organizations who are working to make a difference and improve our quality of life. I want to express my gratitude to the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario and all of tonight's honourees.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful and enjoyable event.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maurizio Bevilacqua".

Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua, P.C.

Mayor

“

Thank You for Attending
the ICCO Unico Primo
Pentola d'Oro Awards Gala

”



A WELCOME FROM ICCO PRESIDENTS

Distinguished Guests:

As Co-Presidents of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario (ICCO) it gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the 2017 Pentola D'Oro Awards.

Our awards gala this evening caps off the Centitalia, Italian Food week held in conjunction with the culinary school of Centennial College.

It seems like yesterday that the first edition of the Pentola D'Oro Awards event was held on the stage of the Hummingbird Centre with a limited amount of places for attendance. This year's event has attracted over 400 people including many leaders of the Italian food Scene and a vast array of generous sponsors.

This year has been remarkable in the fact that the new Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA Agreement) between Canada and Europe finally came into existence in September of this year. The CETA agreement will see the elimination of many trade barriers between Europe and Canada and will result in Canadians being able to enjoy even a greater selection of food products from Europe at very economical prices.

The Pentola D'Oro Awards can be considered the "Oscars" of the Canadian Food scene and our award recipients certainly validate that the Canadian Food industry is second to no other country in the world. We congratulate this year's award recipients, Mr. Vince Scornaienchi, Mr. Pietro Nenci and Noce Restaurant on their accomplishments and in being chosen as the recipients of the 2017 Pentola D'Oro Awards. Each of these individuals bring in one way or another, Italian Culture, Italian Food Products, Italian recipes and Italian cooking techniques to the forefront of the Canadian Food scene.

In conclusion, we cordially thank our fellow ICCO board members and in particular our Executive Director Mr. Corrado Paina, and his team for putting this evening together for the community. We especially thank our event sponsors and everyone in attendance this evening. Your participation continues to make this event a resounding success. We truly hope that you enjoy this evening's festivities and we look forward to hosting you next year.

Thank you once again.

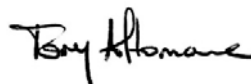
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Interview With Corrado Paina

Why have you created the Pentola d'Oro Awards? Do we need another event on food?

This is the same question that I am often asked by Italian companies, or by Canadian companies, or by consumers: do we need more food? Canadian consumers often wonder if Canada is already full. But we realize year after year that the demand for food increases exponentially. That is the reality. So why start our own award? There may already be some good awards, but within this community, and within the Canadian industry, there's no award quite like this one.

Why is food so important in today's society?

Food is important in every society. But I think the main issue today is health. I think ten or twenty years ago people simply tried to enjoy life, and today they are actually taking note of the food they consume—even the measurements of food. And people are noticing which food is better, and which is not so good. It's no longer just about a chemical composition of taste and feeling, it's something more. It's about our future.

What do Italians in particular have to contribute to this?

First of all, recent stats have shown that Italy has one of the highest old-age rates in the world. An Italian has a greater chance to live longer than 86 years than many persons in the world. People know there is a strong connection today between food and health. It is quite obvious that we are moving towards a new generation of people who are returning to the source of things.

How or why were the winners of the award chosen?

Because there is a commitment from them all, at different levels, to produce, to import, to promote quality. They believe strongly in the integrity of the ingredients. They continue to propose different products to bring to the table, as well as new experiences, traditions, stories, and so on. And definitely the fact that they work a lot with Italy. To give an example, a few years ago one company had a very different business and philosophy, and today, you just have to see their shelves to see how many things have changed. Fortinos has a strong history of contributing many important things to the Italian story. We see a family business become bigger and bigger, as well as a growing, sure knowledge of Italian cuisine. And Noce is one restaurant that has a clear manifesto about its food. It's austere, simple, and extremely sophisticated at the same time. And Costco? In this temple of goods one finds Italy more and more.

ICCO Executive Director

The ICCO has been to Italy with Prime Minister Trudeau, and we always see you working in the community. What is the focus of the ICCO and what will you do in the future?

The old business organizations have to follow what is ahead of them and ahead of the institutions themselves, which is the business stream. Why? Because sometimes individual businesses are able to gamble, to be braver than institutions or business organizations. We sometimes shift because we follow business, or because our members want more. Food is one matter but there's more. Innovation has become the password, the slogan of institutions, governments, and so on. But we also know that innovation is directly linked to immigration. Countries like Canada are planning to have more and more people who will be working in particular sectors. Not to mention that there is a strong link between food and innovation.

Is there room for more Italian exports coming into in Canada?

Yes, there's room. Whoever goes to Italy will be impressed by the variety of regional products available. This also means that Italian companies must make an effort to create quantity without losing the quality in order to face new markets like Canada. But the CETA agreement is creating a framework to increase food imports, because in the first phase, customs and duties are going to be erased. So CETA contributes to an atmosphere of exchange, of a flow of goods and services. A lot of historical situations in, and surrounding Canada, seem to lean naturally toward Europe. And vice versa.

So, are we at the end of a cycle now, starting something new?

Well, I don't want to get into politics or geopolitics, but we're definitely getting into an important agreement—a market of 500 million, versus a market of 35 million. We can foresee that there will be a huge flow of goods, and Italy can play an incredible role for a long time. Let me give you an example: Canada has essentially been saying to investors, business people, and the government, if you go to the United States then come visit us—we're close. Today you can say, come to Canada, then if you want, you can go to the United States. There was a shift in the identity and presentation of Canada's image, and of its potential. That's what's happening now, so really, things are changing.

There are many business organizations throughout Toronto and Ontario and Canada, so why should the business community work with the ICCO?

For two simple reasons. First, CETA will be essential. And the Chamber has a key, a passport to Italy and to Europe. For Canadian investors and businesses, it will be essential. For Italian companies, we are absolutely the gate and they should join us. We live here, we produce here, we have offices both here and in Italy. I will honestly say without arrogance: it is an ideal solution for a business person to use our services, for a company interested in the Canadian and European market.



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JOHN PORCO

COO of Unico Inc. & Primo Foods



Unico and Primo are extremely honoured and proud to be sponsors of the 2017 Pentola d'Oro Awards.

We are here this evening to recognize the outstanding business achievements of Italian Canadian companies and individuals in the Italian food and beverage industry. The Pentola d'Oro is an event solely created to promote Italian food and beverages. It exemplifies the importance of food within Italian culture. Unico and Primo are two of Canada's oldest and most iconic Italian food companies, with a long, storied history.

Our original owners set out to provide Italian Canadians, and many new immigrants and their families, with products that they were accustomed to back in Italy. We imported goods from Italy like olive oil, canned tomatoes, and olives; this also provided the impetus to begin producing pasta, vegetable oils, and beans, right here in Canada. Our current owners, the Iacobelli family, along with all our employees, are continuing the tradition, always guided by, and driven to provide, only the highest quality products from our Italian heritage.

As Canadian market leaders in the categories and segments we compete in, Unico and Primo products can be found in stores from coast to coast, from Newfoundland to B.C. This is a real testament to our commitment to provide quality products to consumers across Canada.

At Unico and Primo we feel that we must continue to instill the culture of Italian food and also communicate the passion and quality it provides our families at every meal occasion, whether at special festive gatherings, or in our everyday lives. As we all know, for Italians, the most important time of the day is when we sit down at dinner and find out what is really going on in everyone's lives.

The Pentola d'Oro is a night to pay tribute to the Canadian Italian food industry as it comes together to celebrate our successes and quite simply, to just enjoy each other's company.

This year's award recipients have all made tremendous contributions to the Italian food and beverage industry in Canada and truly exemplify the spirit of this event.

On behalf of Unico and Primo I offer my sincere congratulations.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "John Porco". The signature is written in a cursive style.

John Porco

COO, Unico Inc. & Primo Foods

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On behalf of Unico and Primo I
offer my sincere congratulations.”

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ANTIPASTO

Artisanal bread basket with olive tapenade

Speck with arugula, shaved montasio, cherry tomatoes, olive oil, balsamic reduction

PRIMO

Lasagna verde with wild boar ragu, bechamel & pecorino cheese

SECONDO

Braised beef short rib with fregola, fava beans, cauliflower, and grilled corn

DESSERT

Frutti di bosco
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Interview With Giuseppe Pastorelli



Photo by Jesse Milns / Dolce Media Group

Consul General of Italy in Toronto

This is a really vibrant moment in the relationship between Italy and Canada, especially now with the CETA agreement coming into effect. What do you foresee happening as a result of these changes?

I expect to see more Italy in Canada, and more Canada in Italy, and in Europe. CETA is not only a progressive economic and trade agreement; it is a strong message of integration of people and economies across the Atlantic. Moreover, thanks to CETA I hope I will finally have the chance to purchase the "zizzona di Battipaglia" in Toronto!

How do you think the Italian and Canadian companies in the food sector will be impacted by these changes?

I trust that companies in both countries will be positively impacted by CETA and, more importantly, that consumers will benefit from a wider range of products at a lower price as well as the advantages that greater mobility of goods, services, and people will bring along. Institutions in Europe and Canada have the duty to raise awareness and address any concerns.

How important is the food sector industry today and what is its future?

The food sector is not only an essential component of Italian exports but a way to promote a culture, a territory, and a way of living — what we call "Vivere all'italiana." I see a bright future.

What do the Pentola d'Oro Awards represent to you?

Pentola d'Oro is an excellent tool to promote the friendship between Italy and Canada in the agrifood business and hospitality — a successful event that keeps growing every year thanks to the vision and hard work of the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Ontario. Complimenti a loro!

Interview With

Matteo Picariello

You have recently moved from Chicago to Toronto to work as the ICE Trade Commissioner. How well do you know Toronto?

I directed the Chicago office for the past five years and I took the helm of the Italian Trade offices in Canada, Toronto, and Montréal, this past August. I had been to Toronto a few times before. Mostly work-related, short visits. It is fair to say that I hardly know the city but I am definitely committed to learning as much as I can as fast as I can. From what I've seen so far, I am very positively impressed.

How is Toronto (and Canada) a different trade environment from the United States?

Toronto and Chicago have some similarities but there are also many differences. They are both large multicultural metropolises and economical financial hubs for their respective countries. With almost 2.7 million residents, Toronto is the fourth largest city in North America and generates approximately 10% of Canada's GDP. In terms of population, Chicago is slightly smaller but it has almost twice Toronto's GDP (\$600 billion vs. \$300 billion) or 6% of the USA GDP. The differences in trade volumes and environments are in part a reflection of the uneven market sizes. The comparison with the US, which is based on sheer demographic numbers and economic figures, is usually a diminishing one for Canada and Toronto. However, when we focus the attention on specific clusters of innovation, technology, creativity, which this country and this city are rich in, the playing field levels up a bit.

One perceivable distinction between Toronto and Chicago, is that, though both cities boast a sizable population of Italian descent, the Italian community in Toronto seems to be somewhat more vibrant and with stronger ties to the old country. This is, in my view, a definite plus for Toronto and one that Italy can take advantage of in terms of trade and investment opportunities.

What do you hope to accomplish while you are here? Are there any particular initiatives you are excited about working on?

The mandate of the Italian Trade Commission (Italian Trade Agency) worldwide is to foster business relationships, economic partnerships and investments between Italy and foreign countries. This is also my prime directive while in Canada as it was during my stay in Chicago. The way I would like to fulfill my mandate is by leveraging on the broad network of Italian and Italian-Canadian businesses, associations and institutions, and create holistic, collaborative, and hopefully long-lasting bonds

What do you see as the biggest challenge in promoting trade with Italy?

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) which provisional application came into effect last September 21, will progressively eliminate or significantly reduce the most pressing trade barriers between Italy and Canada. A few, relatively small compromises had to be made, on both sides, in order for the agreement to be signed, however its long-lasting effects should be to create jobs, strengthen economic relations and trade between Canada, Italy and the world's second-largest market, the EU.

Italian Trade Commissioner to Canada

One of the remaining hurdles in furthering trade is, in my view, the reliance of Canadian companies on the USA as their major trading partner: 76% of Canadian-made goods and services are exported to the USA, which in turn accounts for over 50% of Canadian imports. The objective reasons for this dependency are various; however, it is risky for Canada to rely so heavily on one trading partner, especially in light of recent developments such as NAFTA re-negotiations and the lumber disputes.

How will the recent implementation of the CETA agreement change the trading relationship between Italy and Canada, particularly within the food sector? What does it mean for Italian and Canadian companies?

Over 16% of Italy's exports to Canada are food and beverages. Italy is among the leading suppliers of wine, oil, cheese, pasta and coffee to Canada. CETA provisions, once fully implemented, will increase overall trade between Italy and Canada.

In particular, the cheese import quotas are slated to double in the next few years and Italy should be the major beneficiary of this change. Furthermore, CETA will increase the protection of geographical indications. 41 Italian GIs are specifically recognized by the agreement. From Parmigiano Reggiano, to Prosciutto di Parma to Ricciarelli di Siena. The Italian Trade Commission has launched a campaign named "Made in Italy" to promote authentic Italian products and counter the so-called 'Italian-sounding' phenomenon. The campaign is in its third year in Canada and the US. CETA, in terms of GI recognitions has now, at least partially, filled a long-existing legislative vacuum.

While some Canadian companies might have to face some hurdles like pressure to innovate, (marketing, branding and diversifications), the ultimate winners are Canadian and Italian consumers, who will be offered a broader range of products to choose from at lower prices and higher quality.

How important is the food sector today?

Italy is recognized worldwide for its agrifood products. A mix of tradition, innovation, variety, quality but also good branding and marketing strategies have contributed to the success of "Made in Italy" goods. Needless to say, the food sector accounts for over 1/7 of overall Italian exports to Canada, roughly 1.2 billion dollars. That's how important it is.

What is the future of this industry?

There are numerous trends emerging in the food industry today. Food safety and traceability are increasingly moving up the producers and consumers' agenda. In addition, consumers are demanding healthier, natural foods and organic produce. These trends will definitely continue in the near future. Food processing technologies and farming practices are rapidly evolving to sustain these trends and Italian food producers and food machine manufacturers are at the forefront of this process, providing high quality, top-level food products and services.





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Interview With Alessandro Ruggera

Director
Italian Institute of Culture



How does food relate to culture?

Food and how it is consumed is an important part of the culture and tradition of every community.

What does the role of food say about a culture?

The role of food speaks volumes on the relationship between a culture and its territory. The land gives products that are the basis of a gastronomic culture. In time, specific ways of preparation and consumption are developed, certain productions are favored and others forgotten. It is a process that is in constant mutation, thanks to the influence and contact with different cultures and traditions. The richness of the Italian gastronomic culture comes from the variety of products available and from the many influences it received over time.

What about Italian food culture is exportable to Canada?

The fundamental elements of the Italian gastronomic tradition are genuine ingredients and the simplicity of preparation. These fundamental principles can easily be exported.

What can't be exported?

In principle, all can be exported and accepted but it is natural that in changing the climatic and cultural context the cuisine changes as well. We see this with Italian cuisine in Canada, but this also took place with Italian cuisine in Italy: many products or dishes that are considered "Italian" today were, in the past, regional dishes and were later accepted and modified by other Italian regions.

Do you think the CETA agreement will change anything about our understanding of Italian food culture?

CETA will certainly allow an easier exchange of products and a better understanding of the Italian gastronomic culture in Canada.

Any comments on events like the Pentola d'Oro Awards?

A great event that is very useful for the promotion of Italian gastronomy.

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ITALIAN NATIONAL TOURIST BOARD



Interview With Mauro Giacobbe



Coordinator
ENIT – Italian National
Tourist Board

Tourism is increasing both ways between Canada and Italy. How do you account for this, and how has interest in Italy changed (if it has)?

In addition to the positive statistics of Canadians going to Italy, in recent years we have seen the inclusion of new Italian Regions in the catalogs of Canadian tour operators, thanks also to the promotion done by our organization. The numerous articles on Italy have also contributed to the popularity of certain destinations, previously unknown in North America.

Is food an element that can be used to promote tourism?

Absolutely! For the Canadian market, the food and wine product is in second place after Art Cities and Culture. Food and wine tourism is, and will be, one of the strategic keys of our country's tourist offer.

The recent CETA agreement has lifted barriers to trade between Italy and Canada. How will that affect the work you do promoting Italy here in Canada?

CETA is a trade agreement, and for the Italian agri-food industry the acknowledgment of new DOP and IGP products in Canada could be important. I do not think there will be negative effects for our tourism promotion. Probably tourists will finally be able to find in Canada some of the food and wine they discovered during their trips to Italy.

Are there any particular initiatives you are undertaking (especially within the food sector) that you are excited about?

The new FICO Eataly World

FICO (Fabbrica Italiana Contadina) will open its doors in Bologna on November 15, 2017.

The 20-acre complex promises to showcase 108,000-square feet of orchards, gardens, and pastures; 40 different workshops where you can watch pasta and cheeses being made; and 25 different restaurants and food stalls. Eataly reps are projecting that six million tourists will come visit annually; two million will be foreigners.

www.eatalyworld.it/en/

What is the next challenge for ENIT?

The challenge is to increase the market share, offering new destinations and tourist products to those who want to return to Italy. Also, the younger generation — the so-called Millennials — is revolutionizing the way tourism is done and is the new target for the coming years. New promotion strategies are needed using social media and new technologies, for example VR (virtual reality).

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VINCE SCORNIAENCHI EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FORTINOS LTD. & FRESH FOOD DEVELOPMENT

Vince Scorniaenchi is a second-generation member of the family who began Fortinos Supermarkets, and is currently Executive Vice President. This year Fortinos celebrates its 55th year in business, and Vince has been with the company for 43 of those years. At the age of 12 during the summer, Vince would accompany his uncle (and Fortinos founder) John Fortino to the Ontario Food Terminal at 4 o'clock in the morning, 6 days a week. Over the years he has had a hand in all aspects of the business: buying the product, preparing and merchandizing it for sale, selling, and delivering. And his passion for such work has not wavered with time: "that whole cycle was such an energizing, intriguing thing for me, I fell in love with it."

His level of experience is invaluable. "Being able to speak with credibility and authority on virtually every part of your business is important to gain the respect and the trust from the people who work for you. For me, understanding the business from the grassroots up is important." Today a typical work day might see him analyzing information to identify trends, adjusting strategies, developing new concepts in food, connecting with people, and spending time in the stores to see how his work has paid off first-hand, and to take note of where things could be improved.

Vince has seen the industry change dramatically over the last 40 years. Then food was sold through a single channel—conventional food stores—and the food was mostly packaged or canned. Now there are a variety of grocery stores, and the food is generally fresher and healthier. Although the company has grown to boast 23 stores in Ontario, some things for

Fortinos have never changed, like basing their business model on "fair price for good quality, good clean stores, great service, and building consumer trust."

Growing up, food played a significant role in Vince's Italian household. "Food and family were both very central to everything that we did." A typical weekend included a meal with 40 or so extended family members, or 2 to 3 hours spent eating lunch on a Sunday. Vince identifies strongly with the Italian community, and appreciates the community and unity that is found in it and Canada at large. "Given our name and the markets that we trade, having Italian products is essential for us," says Vince, stating that Italian food is as popular as ever, and consumer demand is strong. He adds that CETA helps address issues of availability and affordability, "so we'll be buying more for sure."

The advice Vince offers to new or aspiring business owners is that it doesn't matter what you do, passion is essential. "Today the secret is, you get out of it what you put into it...it's a lot of work up front, you need to sacrifice a little bit to get to where you want to be." And he has the credentials to prove it, as a recipient of the award for Excellence in Business from the Canadian Italian Business and Performance Association, the Golden Pencil Award (one of the highest honours in the Canadian food industry), and the Italian Heritage award, which recognizes overall contribution to the community or promotion of Italian heritage and culture.

"I love this industry, I love selling food...it invigorates me. And it's part of my culture, of my Italian heritage."



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PIETRO NENCI VP/GMM Eastern Canada Food and Sundries
& Corporate Food Canada

COSTCO WHOLESALE CANADA LTD.

Pietro Nenci plays a large role in what Canadians find in their refrigerators and pantries on a daily basis. As the Costco Vice President and General Merchandise Manager of Eastern Canada Food and Sundries, his duties include quality assurance and food safety, as well as overseeing the Kirkland Signature private label for Canada. This means that besides crunching numbers and making sure his division is profitable, he is out on the road, in constant contact with different Costco locations, monitoring inventory levels, seeing how the product looks and feels on the sales floor, and checking in on the competition. Along the way there are trade shows to find new vendors that can supply the Kirkland Signature brand, with its criteria of high quality, low price items.

Nenci began his career at the Price Club, before it merged with Costco, in the automotive department. When he transferred to food in the late eighties he learned on the job, by getting involved with products and vendors and trying to make better deals for the company and for the consumer. He also had an early critic who helped. "With my Italian origins," Nenci says, "it was a daily conversation around the table. I was constantly challenged by my mother about our value and pricing and quality. Because in the family, food was—like any Italian immigrant family—very important around the house."

Nenci has witnessed a big change in the industry since he started. "In those days, it was a business

driven by large companies and consumers were not as educated on nutrition. It was brand-driven and price-driven and there was very little room for small companies to come in the mix." Today, people are much more educated about nutritional health: "they are looking for alternatives, they want to buy local, organic; they read nutritional panels and food safety is a must."

"Consumers today make retailers better," says Nenci, "because if you're not good, if you don't listen, understand and change, then you'll have a tough time. We evolved a lot." He remembers a time when it was impossible to sell genuine Parmigiano Reggiano because it "didn't connect." Today Italian products are mainstream and the evolution that Nenci has played a large part in, continues to unfold. The new CETA agreement, for instance, means Nenci will have more options to bring in new categories from Italy and the European Union. This lifting of quota restrictions means that with more goods coming into the Canadian market, the increased competition will be a win for consumers.

Nenci remembers travelling to Italy to as a young man to bring back items for Costco. "When we started we were not known. We had to fight for them to sell a container to a Canadian label. Today it's the opposite. We are known in Europe, we are known in Italy, and I'm proud to have been part of that process."



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ELENA MORELLI & GUIDO SALDINI OWNERS NOCE RESTAURANT

Guido Saldini and Elena Morelli could easily be the favourite Hotspot Award contenders for Aria, the remarkable restaurant they opened in 2011 on the main floor of the Telus Tower, next to the ACC. It ticks off all of the culinary and architectural boxes required of a favourite hotspot. Toronto Life called it "...the most beautiful restaurant in town." But as good as it is, it is for Noce, their first restaurant, that they are being honoured—for the quality of the food, the service, for their longevity in an industry that is notoriously prone to bankruptcy, and for their ability over 23 years to develop and maintain a devoted clientele that is now multi-generational.

Noce, (named after their location at the corner of Walnut St. and Queen St. West) came into being at a time when Queen St., around Trinity Bellwoods Park, was known mostly for prostitutes, pushers and pimps. Saldini found the location and was attracted by the cheap rent and the proximity to downtown. Morelli, knowing it as a rough neighbourhood, remembers asking Saldini, "Where are we going?" He responded, "It's where the artists are and you'll see, it's going to grow." It was a counterintuitive move when they opened as a fine dining destination with white tablecloths, professional service, and a deep wine cellar. And it wasn't always easy. Saldini laughs, remembering how sketchy the street was back then. "Oh, you have no idea. In front of the window there was a telephone booth and we had to call to have it removed because it was everything but a telephone booth."

Before long Noce found a dedicated following of food lovers from every neighbourhood in the city. They were attracted to the honest and authentic Italian food, the warm atmosphere, and the attention paid to the smallest details. Noce has always worked hard to source the best ingredients for their menu. They buy their beef from a single Ontario farm and use the whole animal, just as they do when buying a pig from a Quebec farm. They source the best wild fish, import a year's supply of Carnaroli rice for their risotto, and make sure they know the provenance of everything that ends up on a Noce plate.

These days, after an extensive renovation, they have added a wood-burning oven and shifted the menu to match the changing tastes of their neighbourhood clientele. The oven is not just a fad for the two partners. Before Noce, 35 years ago, Saldini was the first restaurateur in Ontario to have a wood-burning oven and he had to get a bylaw changed to make it happen.

Longevity is always difficult in the restaurant business as tastes can change quickly. The partnership that created Noce is what has maintained their success. Morelli notes, "We built a certain bond and it has flourished over 23 years of business partnership and 30 years of friendship." And these partners, who so obviously respect each other, see no reason to stop. As Saldini says with a smile, "she's fifteen years younger than me and full of energy." There's no reason to think Noce won't remain a Toronto favourite for many years to come.



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