

Taffy business a sweet one for Glaser family

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 SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

ATLANTIC CITY — Frank Glaser wants to know, “What is life without sweets?”

For Glaser and his family, now in its fifth generation as candy makers, the answer is simple: Sweets are their life.

Since the 1940s, they have owned the James’ Candy Co., a name synonymous with both Atlantic City and salt water taffy.

By 10 a.m. on most days, Glaser, who is president of the company, has already eaten several pieces of the chewy confection.

“My great-grandfather and grandfather were candy makers in Germany who came to the United States and opened candy stores in Philadelphia,” he said.

The stores were called Dairy Maid and, at one time, there were 11 of them.

In 1947 the Glasers bought James’ Salt Water Taffy in Atlantic City.

“We were trying to have a more rounded business,” he said.

In the summer, without air conditioning, there was little chocolate manufacturing, so the candy business in Philadelphia was slow, while demand for salt water taffy at the Shore was high.

Today, Dairy Maid is gone, but the Glasers’ sweet empire includes both James and Fralinger’s — the onetime rival to James — and the recently acquired the three Bayard’s Chocolate House stores in Cherry Hill, Cinnaminson and Pennsauken.

The term salt water taffy supposedly was invented by accident in 1883. The story

goes that a shopkeeper by the name of David Bradley was cleaning up after a huge storm flooded his Boardwalk store, soaking his inventory. When a young customer came in and asked to buy a bag of taffy, he sarcastically told the girl to take some of his “salt water taffy.”

It’s not certain who actually invented the taffy or created the recipe. And although it’s been a mainstay in Atlantic City for well over 100 years, some say that taffy appeared at Midwest country fairs much earlier.

Joseph Fralinger is credited with popularizing salt water taffy. He marketed it not only as a confection for bathers and Boardwalk strollers, but also as a boxed souvenir for vacationers to take home.

Enoch James became Fralinger’s biggest rival. James moved from the Midwest to the Shore, locating his shop on the Boardwalk, near Fralinger’s.

Each brand of taffy had its own features and its own loyal followers.

There is no salt water in the taffy, but its association with the Shore has become irrefutable.

“No question about it,” Glaser said. “Atlantic City is the salt water taffy capital of the world.”

New Jersey’s Casino Redevelopment Authority plans a \$50 million rejuvenation of the Atlantic City Boardwalk that will include the restoration of the old façade on the James’ building at New York Avenue.

And even though sales are brisk — in the summer months, James’ and Fralinger’s produce 11,000 pounds of taffy a day — “this will be a tremendous shot in the arm,” Glaser said.

When James’ acquired Fralinger’s in the early 1980s, it made certain to keep the unique identities of each. Fralinger’s taffy has a long shape, while James’ is rectangular and touted in ads as “cut-to-fit-the-mouth,”



ATLANTIC CITY CONVENTION & VISITORS AUTHORITY

Times change, but taffy is still popular.

a trademarked slogan.

“They are very distinct brands, and we want to maintain that,” said Lisa G. Whitley, the company’s marketing director and Frank Glaser’s daughter. “People have preferences for one or the other. We’re remaining true to what the brands were — the Fralinger’s satchel, the James’ barrel.”

The James’ barrel, which in recent years had been made of plastic, is being brought back this year in the original papier-mâché.

And Glaser is looking at using some of the original artwork that graced both James’ and Fralinger’s packaging in the early part of the 20th century.

“We are a nostalgia-driven business,” he said.

The old-fashioned way to make taffy involved melting the ingredients — corn syrup, butter, sugar and flavorings, then cooling and pulling the taffy and cutting it into pieces.

“Automation came in the 1920s and 1930s, but it hasn’t changed much since then,” Whitley said, noting that the machines have become more streamlined, efficient and safer. “But in terms of what has to get done to the candy, it is pretty much the same. The technology hasn’t



TAFFY: One company, two familiar names

changed as much as you might think.”

The same is true with customers’ tastes.

“The most popular flavors of taffy, for both James’ and Fralinger’s, remain chocolate, vanilla and strawberry,” Whitley said.

Some things do change.

Since the purchase of Bayard’s, “every piece of candy — all the chocolates and all the taffy we sell is made by us. Bayard’s has afforded us the chance to do this,” Glaser said.

Glaser’s son runs Bayard’s.

The company also publishes a mail-order catalog and has an active Internet business.

“Our product is unique,” Whitley said. “We have people all over the country who have memories of salt water taffy, and they

are finding us on our Web site. The Internet has had a big impact on sales.

“We do have new products. And we are looking to see if products that we made years ago should be brought back.”

The first mail-order catalog was a fold-out pamphlet, and last year’s 24-page booklet morphed into 32 pages this year.

Today about 30 percent of James’ and Fralinger’s sales come from the catalog and the Internet.

James’ and Fralinger’s is a regionally driven business, with eight retail stores confined, until now, to New Jersey.

With the opening this month of a ninth store in Rehoboth, Del., “we are crossing the great divide,” Glaser said. In addition to its brand shops, James’ and Fralinger’s products are available in a handful of candy

and retail stores throughout the United States.



Glaser



Whitley

The company’s second busiest season is Christmas, and it is expanding a line of gift items, adding baskets and towers.

The nostalgic nature of their business, along with evocative packaging, has allowed James’ and Fralinger’s to move into other markets. Most recently Crate & Barrel and Harry & David have been retail customers.

“We can use our past to move into the future,” Glaser said.

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“The Most Famous Names In Salt Water Taffy”

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Fralinger's and James' Salt Water Taffy have been and continue to be a delicious New Jersey Shore tradition.



Salt Water Taffy

Take a trip back to Atlantic City in the 1880s to find the origins of this sticky-sweet New Jersey candy. That is when Joseph Fralinger, a former glassblower and fish merchant, opened his retail store on the boardwalk and began perfecting and selling the very first salt water taffy.

It was around the same time that confectioner Enoch James and his sons began selling their own version. He is credited with making the taffy less sticky, so it wouldn't stick to the wrapper and wouldn't pull out your teeth. James claimed that he was making the taffy before it was being sold on the Atlantic City boardwalk, where he also eventually set up shop.

So where did these confectionary geniuses get the name and the recipe? Well, that's still a mystery (or a closely-guarded family secret) but rumor has it the name came after a high tide washed over a candy merchant's stand, and when a little girl asked him for taffy he responded (with sarcasm), "You mean salt water taffy..." After that the name just stuck.

Regardless of how it got its name, or who truly started the taffy craze, Fralinger's and James' Salt Water Taffy have been and continue to be a delicious New Jersey Shore tradition.

"I think it's very representative of the shore," says Lisa G. Whitley, marketing director for Fralinger's and James' and daughter of the owner, Frank J. Glaser. The businesses, started by two families but now owned by one, have been family-owned for five generations.

But what is it that makes salt water taffy such an

appealing and popular confection?

"Well, it's a fun candy to eat," Whitley suggests. "It's chewy and flavorful and it tastes of memories of the shore — the beach and the ocean and just being by the sea."

And with 20 new flavors recently added, there's also variety. But Whitley says chocolate is still the most popular flavor.

"My favorite changes every week, but if I had to pick I'd say either peanut butter or coconut," she says.

Fralinger's and James' have 124 years of history to credit to their success, but it's not just being old that makes their taffy great.

"I would say what makes ours different is that we adhere to the original recipe of the company," Whitley says. "We use high-quality flavoring — you know how you can buy a Hershey bar or Godiva chocolate? We're the Godiva of salt water taffy; we use the finest ingredients that there are."

There are currently nine James' and Fralinger's stores, most located right on the Atlantic City boardwalk, though they've branched out as far as Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and can be found in Stone Harbor, Cape May, Wildwood and Ocean City. They also wholesale their taffy to stores all across the country.

"We sell all the way out in California and Washington State," Whitley says. So if you're craving taffy but you're miles from a beach, you can also purchase their taffy online at www.seashoretaffy.com or by calling (800) 93-TAFFY from Monday to Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

fun summer foods

*Our picks for the best fun
summer food New Jersey
has to offer!*

Summer is about a lot of things: Long days and warm nights; catching lightning bugs at dusk and catching waves at dawn. It's about walks on the boardwalk and hikes through the woods; and just laying in a hammock, listening to the breeze go through the trees.

But most of all, summer is about the food. Each of us has a great summer food memory, whether it was swallowing a watermelon seed for the first time or making ice pops. Summer is FUN and so is summer food. Here are our picks for the best fun summer food New Jersey has to offer!

