

Australian Pie Manufacturer to add 49 jobs in Toledo

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Crikey's Genuine Australian Pies has acquired a 3,117 square foot facility on Rosetta Street in the City of Toledo to expand its operations. The company plans to add 49 jobs within three years, and retain its 6 current employees.

The new facility will be equipped with rotating ovens, rapid chill refrigerators, blast freezers, and automated packaging equipment. The company will invest about \$800 thousand into the project, including the building and equipment. Crikey's worked with Nancy Lehmann, CCIM, at Michael Realty in acquiring the building.

Crikey's is led by a mother and son team from Perth, Australia in 2001. Crikey's was established in June 2002 with the vision of introducing Australian cuisine to the American marketplace. The company is a frozen food manufacturer with genuine Australian pies as its primary product. The company produces, distributes, and packages the meat pies. The company sells its products to such retailers as The Andersons, Chief's Supermarkets, Churchill's Super Market, Giant Eagle, Kazmier's 5-Star Market, Meijer, Sautter's 5-Star Market, Walt Churchill's Market, and hot food truck vendors.

Crikey's new building was a good fit for the company for a number of reasons. "One thing was certainly attractive was that it is in Toledo," stated Purri Gould. "From the beginning, we've wanted to create business and opportunities in Toledo." The facility also recently had a new roof installed, new floors, a number of renovations, and good infrastructure.

"We didn't have to do a lot of structural changes to bring it up to code and to adapt it for the purpose that we have, and that was very good," Lynne Gould added. Crikey's did have to add a 1,200 square foot freezer, which is nearing completion as we go to press, and operations anticipated to start-up at the new facility at any time.

The company's loyalty to Toledo began with the Gould family's understanding that Toledo is a great test market for the food industry. They opened a small bakery in Woodville Mall, and later moved to a location on Collingwood with the help of a loan through the City of Toledo.

"What we soon realized, once we were accepted into local stores like Kroger, is we're competing against national brands," explained Purri Gould. "With small volumes, the labor cost is quite high. But we've got the quality, and a really good tasting pie. The next step, we always knew, is to produce on a bigger scale."

The company plans to maintain the quality and taste of smaller batches of pies it has been making, although the new process will be more automated. The key piece of equipment is a 9-plate rotary pie system, which is manufactured by Colborne Corporation out of Lake Forest, Illinois. The machine will sheet the pastry, deposit the filling in consistent portions, and place and crimp the pastry lid. This process was previously done by hand. The fresh ingredients will still be combined manually, but in larger batch sizes than before.

"We realized that if we want to have quality, that there will be ceiling. We're never going to be able to produce huge volume and retain this home-baked taste," Purri Gould explained. "We haven't explored what that ceiling is yet. The idea has always been, rather than set-up one huge facility, to set up facilities later down the line that suit

the local markets... We think we can get a competitive advantage by building these smaller factories that have that home-baked taste and are tailored to the local market. America's tastes and preferences do seem to change geographically."

There is a family tradition behind Crikey's. Frank Seton, an Australian baker and cousin of the Gould family, began developing pies in the early 1970s. The company currently offers three pies: chicken and broccoli, steak and mushroom, and a shepherd's pie. Many new product innovations are on the horizon, including an all-natural apple pie.

Crikey's pies are baked and then snap frozen to preserve their freshness. They are enclosed in an individual package designed with a microwave receptor that crisps the pie as it is heated. This packaging allows the consumer to complete the second baking in approximately three minutes.

Crikey's currently serves the greater Toledo market with its own freezer truck, as far south as Fremont. With the expansion in capacity, the company will begin to branch out to multi-state, with the goal of national distribution. "We'll be exploring options, whether to go through distribution warehouses or to go through actual distributors and outsource that," Purri Gould stated. "It's quite new and exciting for us, but we're working our way through those issues."

Lynne Gould explained the assistance Crikey's has received: "It was a project where a lot of individuals came together and gave us support in order to make this happen. First Merit Bank picked up our project when two of the other local banks turned it down. They worked with Laurie Cantrell at the Port Authority to put together a SBA 504, Ohio 166, and First Merit Bank loan for the equipment and building."

The City of Toledo also provided an initial loan to help with the project. The company also received a tax credit through the Ohio Department of Development and additional support from the Chamber of Commerce and Ohio Department of Agriculture. "Toledo Edison also came onboard to help us with some energy subsidies," stated Lynne Gould. "The Lucas County Workforce Development organization has been wonderful in working with us. This is all about job creation and they have set up an on-the-job training program for us. There's been huge community support and involvement to get this project off the ground."