



Ashley Chapman,
Vice-President

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Chapman's Ice Cream Limited

THE CREAM ALWAYS RISES

Canadian ice-cream icon literally rises from the ashes to regain its sweet top billing in grocery-store freezers

ANDREW JOSEPH, FEATURES EDITOR
PHOTOS BY SANDRA STRANGEMORE

Life is often likened to ice cream, in a sense that it should be enjoyed before it melts away on you, but it would have taken an incredibly wide-eyed optimist to find any silver lining in wake of a devastating fire that laid waste to the family-owned **Chapman's Ice Cream Limited** production facility back on Sept. 4, 2009.

Accidentally started by a welder's torch, the raging inferno completely gutted both the structure and most of the production and packaging equipment housed inside the 85,000-square-foot factory located in Markdale, Ont., about a two-hour drive north of Toronto, throwing serious doubt on the future for Canada's largest independent ice-cream producer and, at the time, the undisputed Number One seller of frozen yogurt products in the country.

Rise Up

But just like with the mythical Phoenix rising from the ashes, the company's long-nurtured sense of steely resolve and self-belief—combined with strong family values and a stoic sense of humor in face of adversity—more than made up for the fire's tragic aftermath to pave the way for a remarkably speedy and exceptionally well-executed recovery.

Today, the *Chapman's* brand name is once again a highly-regarded and well-trusted label for upscale, refined ice cream excellence among millions of Canadian ice-cream lovers won over long ago by the product's outstanding taste profile, high quality and affordable pricing.

Originally expecting to be out of business for about 22 months, the Chapman's operation was in

fact up-and-running in a temporary shelter in just seven months, as *Canadian Packaging* magazine found out during a recent visit to the company's new, bigger-and-better production complex spread out over about 500,000 square feet of space.

"While we ideally wanted to rebuild on the old site, the challenges of constructing a state-of-the-art facility with the same footprint were too great to overcome. This meant that we needed to build an entirely new 'greenfield' facility," explains company vice-president Ashley Chapman, son of the husband-and-wife ownership duo of David and Penny Chapman.

"The only problem was that some employees figured we would be closed for a long time and tried to take vacations," says Ashley, relating that the Chapman family made immediate plans to make sure that all of its employees would be looked after financially, at full pay rates, while the owners would try to get the business back on its feet.

"But because we quickly restarted production in a nearby dry facility we had completed only five weeks prior to the fire, we brought back many key personnel sooner than anticipated," he recalls.

The Chapman's story originally traces back to 1973, when David and Penny decided to pur-

chase a 100-year-old creamery in Markdale after having worked for various dairy companies in the Toronto area—learning first-hand about the ice-cream business and identifying many niche market opportunities that just seemed to go begging at the time.

"Back in the early 1970s, if you wanted ice cream you could get chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, the 'exotic' butterscotch ripple ice-cream flavor... and that was pretty much it," recalls Penny.

"But we came up with 20 new strange and wonderful flavors that immediately caught the taste-buds of people, and soon we were on our way," she says, adding that because the purchased creamery was already pre-zoned specifically for ice-cream production, the upstart firm was able to hit the ground running fairly quickly.

While the 2009 fire left little behind except for a few still-frozen buckets of ice cream lying around in a cold-storage facility, the Chapmans say they were quite grateful to other nearby ice-cream operators with spare production capacity for chipping in with third-party manufacturing help until the company could set up its own emergency manufacturing plant—using mostly pre-owned equipment purchased through an auction down in southern U.S.

Considering the operation's importance to the economic well-being of the

To ensure optimal hygiene security, Chapman's uses an Attec Food Type 23835 walk-through boot cleaner installed by Shawpak Systems.





A carton of Chapman's ice cream cups passes through an Alpha Checkweigher and a Mettler-Toledo Safeline PowerPhase PRO metal detection unit, with both units supplied and installed by Shawpak Systems.

village of Markdale—in 2009 employing 350 people out of a population of 1,400 residents—the company's dramatic rise from the dead at a brand new production complex located just a few blocks away from the original factory—housing a new 165,000-square-foot central production plant designated as a peanut and nut-free manufacturing facility; a separate 50,000-square-foot plant for producing ice-treats containing nuts; administration offices; a 18,000-square-foot nut warehouse; and a 150,000-square-foot distribution center just down the highway—can hardly be overstated.

People Power

Today employing nearly 500 people, with room to accommodate up to 650 employees during the busy peak seasons, the present-day Chapman's Ice Cream operation was designed to meet whatever production, regulatory or other challenges the future holds, according to Chapman's, which also operates a 100,000-square-foot support warehouse to store packaging and ingredients to keep the production lines running.

Naturally, that included being able to overcome any fire-related emergencies, which was effectively addressed with construction of the company's own self-contained water reservoir and pump house, according to Ashley Chapman.

"Of course that wasn't too much of a surprise," he remarks, "but even before the fire, because of our size we didn't want to put too much pressure on Markdale's fairly limited resources, so we became the first ice-cream company in Ontario to have our own wastewater treatment plant."

Also slated for this coming spring is a new state-of-the-art reverse osmosis system that allow Chapman's to reuse 100 per cent of its production wastewater in rooftop condensers.

The new Chapman's digs also include a separate freezer area, a designated CIP (clean-in-place) room, a product testing lab, and a well-staffed R&D (research-and-development) room.

Nowadays comprising well over 100 different SKUs (stock-keeping units), Chapman's diverse flagship brand product portfolio includes many stalwart bestsellers such as *Original Ice Cream*, *Premium Ice Cream*, *Premium Canadian Collection*, *Frozen Yogurt*, *Frozen Yogurt Bars*, *Yogurt Plus* and *Sorbet*—along with the more recently-introduced *Lactose Free/No Sugar Added*

ice-cream recipes, and various individually-packed novelty products such as *Li'l Lollies*, *Sandwiches*, *Rockets*, *Cones* and other popular froze treats marketed at most major grocery chains and independent grocery stores across Canada coast-to-coast.

"There are over 100 SKUs for our brands alone, but we also turn out roughly the same number for our private-label customers too," states Ashley, saying the private-label market accounts for about 40 per cent of the company's total revenues, with major national grocers like *Loblaws*, *Metro* and *Sobeys* among some of its bigger private-label accounts.

Asked to explain the popularity and brand loyalty for Chapman's products among Canadian consumers, Ashley cites unrivaled taste, texture, high aesthetics appeal of both the product and the high-graphics packaging, consistent quality, competitive pricing and, last but not least, artisan-like authenticity of the final product.

"One of the key things to keep in mind is that we make real ice cream," asserts Ashley.

"To be legally considered ice cream in Canada, the product must have a minimum of 10-percent butterfat," he says, explaining the importance of getting the butterfat content balance just right: too little makes the product taste too icy; too much

makes it feel closer to lard and can stick to the roof of the mouth.

Ditto for the frozen yogurt products manufactured by Chapman's, which estimates to enjoy a dominant 80-percent share of the Canadian frozen yogurt market.

"Actually my mother (Penny) hates yogurt," he confides, "so it was paramount for us to create a frozen yogurt that tasted like ice cream as much as possible."

Adds Penny: "I still hate yogurt, but our Frozen Yogurt is a really tasty product."

Along with continuous product innovation carried out daily at the plant's R&D department, the Chapman's facility naturally takes well-deserved pride in its strictly-followed product quality and safety regimen and procedures.

Quality First

"We do full quality testing in our lab on every batch of ice cream product we produce," says Ashley, citing the plant's internationally-recognized *SQF* certification of the **Safe Quality Food Institute**; the A-grade and 'zero non-conformances' *BRC* certification of the **British Retail Consortium**, recently achieved with the assistance and training of **GCP Consulting**; and full compliance with all the allergen audits administered by the **Guelph Food Technology Centre (GFTC)**.

To ensure highly hygienic production environment throughout the plant, Chapman's worked with the renowned Canadian food inspection and packaging systems distributor and integrator **Shawpak Systems Ltd.** of Oakville, Ont., which supplied the plant with top-of-the-line, hygiene equipment manufactured by **Attec Food Technology**, which is designed to eliminate any possible contaminants being carried by plant personnel into the production area.

Donning proper hairnets, bump caps, lab coats, production pants and steel-toed boots, all Chapman's plant employees first move through the Attec *Type 23741* soap dispenser, outfitted with a special sensor to confirm that any person entering the facility soaps their hands first.

After a sensor detects the presence of both hands placed into the soap dispenser at the same time, a dollop of *P3-manosoft* soap, supplied by **Ecolab**, is dispensed onto each hand, after which a motor-

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Frozen yogurt products packed in colorful cartons converted by Boehmer Box, a division of CANAMPAC, enter an Arpac 708 E-27 SS shrinkwrapper to be bundled in six-packs for easier palletizing and transport.



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driven turnstile automatically unlocks to allow the employee to pass to the next area.

The staff must then enter a *Type 23835* walkthrough machine—boasting stainless-steel construction to resist rust corrosion and bacteria growth—which

One of 16 Videojet 1610 small-character inkjet coders used by Chapman's.

turns on automatically when an employee places each booted leg into a separate laneway and walks through holding onto handrails, while the cleaner's multiple spinning brushes scrub water and detergent over the boots in a carwash-like motion.

Ashley notes that all workers upon exiting the production area are required to pass through a second *Type 23835* walk-through boot-cleaner.

After the initial boot cleaning is complete, employees again place their hands within a second *Type 23741* disinfectant dispenser before being allowed a turnstile entrance to the massive production facility boasting "enough mixing capacity to fill two Olympic-size swimming pools," according to Ashley.

Housing a total 16 individual production lines, the plant's manufacturing and packaging area is equipped with a diverse assortment of high-performance filling equipment, including:

- Four **TD Sawvel** fillers;
- Three **Norse Dairy Systems** fillers for sandwich products;
- One filler from **Modern Packaging Line**;
- One **WCB Anderson** hot-melt carton filler, which Ashley says is run at a rate of 1,400 gallons per hour,
- Six **Hoyer Addus FF** fillers from **Tetra Pak**, which are high-speed ingredient feeders designed to ensure continuous, accurate injection of free-flowing granulates for uniform distribution of ingredients within the ice-cream product.
- Another **Hoyer Addus FF** located in the R&D lab, along with a **Frigus KF** freezer designed to ensure low temperature variance for optimal product stability.

According to Ashley, all the production area equipment is thoroughly cleaned on a daily basis with Ecolab's **Foam Force LP** solution—a self-foaming, chlorinated alkaline detergent formulated specifically for the stainless-steel processing equipment widely employed in the dairy industry.



A WCB Anderson hot-melt ice cream carton filler employs an Allen-Bradley PanelView Plus 1250 terminal to monitor, control and display filling rates.

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After the product is filled and sealed in its designated primary packaging, it passes through one of 16 model 1610 small-character inkjet printers from **Videojet Technologies** to have high-quality best-before date, lot number and any other required variable product information applied in crisp, legible lines of print.

"We love these Videojet coders," says Ashley. "Not only do they perform well in our environment, but we also get great customer service from Videojet."

The product is next checked for weight by an **Alpha Checkweigher**, before moving through one of several **Mettler-Toledo Safeline Power Phase PRO** metal detection units—both machines supplied by Shawpak Systems—before being moved up into a giant spiral tunnel freezer manufactured by **Scanima**, a division of Tetra Pak.

A plant employee uses a M.J. Mallis/Wulftec WSML-200-S semi-automatic vertical stretchwrapper to secure a load of product for safe shipment to customer.



in large type right on its retail packaging, and exclusively using 100-percent Canadian milk in its production, Ashley says he is often frustrated by federal labeling regulations that do not allow the company to label its ice

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Freeze Frame

"Measuring 75-feet-long, 33-feet-wide and 28-feet-high, this is one of the largest spiral freezers in North America," extols Ashley.

"And it's fast too, which is important because the quicker you freeze it, the better the ice cream," he says, noting that whereas the freezer system employed at the old plant took between 10 to 14 hours to freeze a standard two-liter carton of ice cream, the new freezer—capable of quickly reaching a core temperature of -18°C—takes only two hours from start to finish.

"The quicker freeze makes a smaller ice crystal," explains Ashley, "which allows us to produce a creamier and smoother ice-cream product."

The freezer unit keeps track of the order of various ice cream products that enter it, and after the freezing process the products move down a second spiral conveyor and are automatically separated by product type onto individual conveyor systems for further upstream packaging, including shrinkwrapping via one of 16 model 708 E-27 SS shrinkwrappers from **Arpac Group** and stretchwrapping of manually palletted loads on one of four model **WSML-200-S** semi-automatic vertical stretchwrappers manufactured by **M.J. Mallis/Wulftec**.

Despite explicitly spelling out itself as a proud Canadian company

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A Tetra Pak Hoyer Rollo RM rotary machine employs Rockwell Automation's Allen-Bradley PanelView Plus 1250 terminal to ensure optimal control over the plant's Lolly line.

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(Above) Wooden sticks to hold the Lolly product are supplied by John Lewis Industries and added via a Lembke stick insertion system. (Left) Powered by a NORD Gear motor, a Festo MS-D series air preparation filter and regulator removes moisture from the surface of the Tetra Hoyer Rollo RM Lolly processing equipment.



A SEW-Eurodrive motor powers a conveyor system moving cartons of product into an Arpac 708 E-27 SS shrinkwrapper.



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cream as “product of Canada.” Tracing to a 2008 regulation declaring that any designated “product of Canada” must contain 98-percent made-in-Canada ingredients, the regulation is a sticky point with Ashley, who has no choice but to use imported simple ingredients like cocoa, sugar, vanilla because they are simply not available as Canadian-made products. “It’s ridiculous: Why penalize anyone if there is no Canadian alternative? “Not only do we use 100-percent Canadian dairy product,” he reasons, “but at every single opportunity we will utilize Canadian ingredients if possible, doing so even at a higher cost if necessary.”

Alpha Checkweigher equipment provides fast, accurate weight control for all Chapman’s products.

“Hence we definitely think of ourselves as a Canadian company, even though our ice cream cannot be officially called a product of Canada,” Ashley reflects. But in the context of the extraordinary adversity that Chapman’s has so convincingly overcome in the last couple of years, Ashley prefers to keep such things in proper large-picture perspective. “At the end of the day, what matters most to all of us here at Chapman’s is the knowledge that we have created the best possible ice-cream product we can and that people really enjoy eating what we make,” says Ashley. “Even with the fire nearly putting us out of business, we always knew that it would only ultimately make us stronger and better,” he concludes. “We’re here to stay.”



A close-up of a Videojet 1610 small-character inkjet coder applying best-before dates and batch number data onto a passing carton of Chapman’s Lolly treats.

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