



From Our Neighborhood to Yours

Beigel's new bakery allows the burgeoning business to take its home-grown goodness to a bigger, broader market.

by Dan Malovany

In a world shadowed in so many hues of gray, it's good to know that some things are simply black and white. Take Beigel's Bakery, which found its home in Brooklyn in the 1940s and never left. The kosher-parve bakery operates by clearly defined rules and with the strictest of discipline that's earned the trust of its loyal customers — many who have been “house accounts” for decades.

During the last few years, however, Beigel's (pronounced “BUY-guls”) found itself branching throughout New York and the Northeast as local residents who moved away from the city nostalgically yearned for a taste of the old neighborhood. Those baked goods include its classic challah and Jewish rye bread, checkerboard cake, bowtie cookies and, yes, its signature Black

and Whites — cake-like cookies dipped in elegant white vanilla and dark chocolate icing.

“The further you go away from New York, the more you want our cookies because they bring back the memories of New York,” noted Joseph Folger, president. “They are part of growing up and sought-after by anybody from New York.”

Recently, Mr. Folger has headed a sales initiative into regional supermarket chains, club stores, mass merchandisers and other big-box stores. “Our name is getting around,” Mr. Folger said. “We're getting noticed out there.”

Moreover, Beigel's ventured into the in-store bakery channel with a line of par-baked and unbaked breads, rolls, rugelach and other items sold under private label or the company's brand Pas Yisroel — Hebrew for “Bread of an Israelite.”

“The bakers just need to pop them into the oven for five to 10 minutes,” noted Martin Atlas, president, Pas Yisroel. “It smells good in the store because it's fresh out of the oven, and bakers can control their waste because they can bake it as they need it.”

Together, these initiatives prompted Beigel's in 2015
Beigel's, a New York institution, is expanding regionally with eyes to go further.

Rooted in history, poised for growth

Founded in 1934 in Krakow, Poland, Beigel's thrived, then survived, in Europe, providing countless suffering people with bread and nourishment during the Nazi occupation during World War II. By 1949, the bakery reestablished itself in Manhattan's Lower East Side, introducing its Black and Whites that have become a trademark of delight in the city.

Over the decades, Beigel's — officially known as the Israel Beigel Baking Co. — prospered.

Today, four partners run the company. They are Joseph Folger, president and head of sales; Martin Gordon, vice-president, who oversees operations; Meiloch Wislicki, who heads production; and Fishel Stiel, who runs the finance department. Mr. Wislicki and Mr. Stiel are second-generation cousins of the founder, Israel Beigel. Mr. Folger and Mr. Gordon are friends who joined the company about 30 years ago.

And the next generation is involved in the day-to-day running of the bakery. They are David Folger, cake production manager; Sruly Gordon, bread production manager (as well as shipping, receiving and purchasing); Sam Wislicki, maintenance and sanitation manager; and Ben Stiel, office manager.

to move from its 35,000-sq-ft facility to a 55,000-sq-ft brown-field bakery located on the other side of Brooklyn. "We simply didn't have enough room at the old bakery," recalled Martin Gordon, vice-president of operations. "We had more orders than our production capability."

Little bit of everything

While the old plant had a single elevator shuttling production among the two floors and basement, the new facility houses two bread and roll lines and two semi-automated sweet goods lines on a single level.

In an adjacent temperature-controlled room, set at 70°F because of the delicate nature of the

products, bakers mass-assemble a combination of sweet goods and indulgent desserts ranging from petit fours to cakes for weddings, bar mitzvahs and other special occasions. This department also houses multiple packaging systems for individually wrapping cookies, pastries and slices of pound cake that are then manually cartoned into family packs or in larger displays for club stores and mass merchandisers.

All dairy-based items such as butter croissants, Danish and cheesecakes are produced in yet another enclosed department with a separate locked entrance and no access from the main production area. That's because the facility is strict kosher; only dedicated employees work exclusively in that department, which includes its own set of mixers, sheeters, proofer and ovens complete with

The bread and roll makeup line combines automation with the hand-twisting of dough to create about 1,200 loaves of traditional challah bread per hour.

Beigel's Bakery



BEIGEL'S BAKERY



washdown capabilities so that no pans leave the secured area.

“We definitely go the extra mile to make sure that kosher is really kosher,” Mr. Folger said.

For instance, all whole eggs — used in about 90% of Beigel’s baked goods — are cracked and separated in-house. To keep up with demand, an automatic system breaks about 100 eggs per minute that are then individually inspected and even separated before they flow into 40-lb pails. “One person is there to make sure that there is no blood in the egg, which is very important to keeping kosher,” Mr. Gordon pointed out. “That’s what we mean by ultra-kosher. It’s what we mean by offering authenticity to our customers.”

Overall, however, the bakery’s complete portfolio consists of nearly 1,000 items that are as culturally diverse as the patchwork of residential neighborhoods that surround the plant, which makes everything from its top-selling challah bread and hamburger and hotdog buns to traditional boiled bagels and even crusty French baguettes. A couple dozen distributors working exclusively for Beigel’s supply fresh products to corner grocers, supermarkets, restaurants, schools, nursing homes, universities, hotels, caterers, airlines, sports stadiums, vending and other institutions.

“We like to maintain the quality of a mom-and-pop shop that has just grown up,” Mr. Folger explained. “We have the pluses of an old bakery around the corner. We do so many items, and there is quite a bit of handwork like we used to do in the old bakery. We like to consider ourselves a one-stop shop for our customers.”

While production flows in a relatively straight line from ingredient handling through packaging to maximize efficiencies, the facility’s biggest asset is its freezer capacity. Beigel’s added 5,000 sq ft to the building and built a 100-pallet freezer to provide ample storage capacity to supply large retail chains and other new customers, which now account for 60% of the company’s sales volume.

Beigel’s also installed a 90- by 20-ft cake and a 25- by 60-ft bread freezer. Those two systems help streamline production by supporting longer production runs of niche products. They also hold unfinished products that allow the company to bake off bread or rolls in case of a surge in demand or hand-decorate a cake for a last-minute special order.

The contrast between the old and new operations still amazes Bill Lehault, senior bakery consultant, WBL Consulting, who collaborated with Beigel’s to transform the warehouse — a former beer distribution center — into a food-grade operation.

“When I came here two years ago, it was kind of mind-boggling as to what they produce,” said Mr. Lehault, who continues to advise the bakery on operations, food safety certification and new product development. “Because of the number of

Above: The new bakery relies on smaller 500-lb batches of dough to produce its kosher bread and rolls.

Left: Precisely divided doughballs eventually are transformed into challah bread.

products it makes, it has to be a semi-automated operation. Even so, the hardest thing is scheduling because Beigel's distributes a lot of fresh product every day. It doesn't carry a lot of inventory, so it needs to use the freezers to streamline production throughout the week. Few people operate at a level that this kosher bakery does."

Fulfilling a vision

Initially, Mr. Lehault worked with contractors and project managers to develop a conceptual design for the facility, sketching out where to locate drains and utilities, for instance, before handing the drawings over for modifications by Beigel's engineering and operations teams.

To ensure food safety, Beigel's built a concrete wall to separate it from an automobile business that shares half of the building, which totals about 155,000 sq ft. Meanwhile, the storage freezer was constructed over a railroad spur. Instead, now the company relies on trucks to

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supply flour and other bulk and minor ingredients.

"We wanted to make sure we had the correct flow and everything was in place where it was needed," Mr. Gordon recalled. "Our vision was about doing what's best for the production."

Today, production runs 24/6 with the bakery closed on the Sabbath. About 130 employees work on two staggered shifts, which start with the prepping of scratch fillings for sweet goods and sponges for breads and rolls. Because of its fresh delivery needs, the operation typically runs at full tilt from 7 p.m. until 3 a.m. so the local distributors can make deliveries



Freshly baked loaves of challah bread leave the three-deck tunnel oven, then are racked and cooled before packaging.

before customers open at the break of dawn.

Flour is delivered via truck to a KB Systems 120,000-lb enclosed flour silo and through a KB sifter. All minor dry ingredients, such as rye flour, are sifted in another room per kosher requirements. Meanwhile, other ingredients such as seeds, toppings and pails of icings are segregated per kosher guidelines or to address allergen concerns. For food security, roughly 60 cameras throughout the facility constantly monitor all aspects of the operation and can be reviewed remotely by the management team.

The main production area is separated into bread and sweet goods departments. Here, semi-automated methods are clearly at work. During *Baking & Snack's* recent visit, Beigel's was producing its popular challah breads. Doughs are mixed in one of two horizontal mixers upgraded with a Pfening Enviro-Blender to ensure precise metering of water to create 500-lb batches. "We prefer to run small batches, not 1,200-lb doughs, because they make a much more consistent product," Mr. Gordon noted. The bread department also has a Sancassiano spiral mixer for making baguettes and other specialty breads.

After a 45-minute rest to relax the dough and develop its flavor, the troughs are automatically lifted to a Gemini-KB makeup line with a 6-pocket divider. Flour dust is applied to the dough balls as they enter an intermediate proofer where they rest for about 18 minutes. The dough pieces then travel through the sheeter and

curling chains to turn the round balls into 6-in.-long strings. The system also has a stamper and other makeup devices to produce Kaisers and a variety of other bread and rolls.

Six operators at the end of the line then take six dough pieces and hand-twist them to form the challah bread,

An orthodox approach to new products

For Beigel's, it's not a case of making what's old new again. When it comes to creating new products, the bakery relies on its expertise to create kosher versions of popular baked goods.

"We're a traditional shop," said Martin Gordon, vice-president of operations. "People come in here with a good idea, and we figure out a way to make it for them, especially if it's a product that isn't in the kosher market."

That's not always easy when it comes to removing the dairy component of baked goods. Instead of milk, Beigel's may incorporate a variety of oils or a combination of other ingredients. "It can be challenging," Mr. Gordon acknowledged. "We have very strict requirements on what we can put into a product, but we work really hard to figure it out so that it's kosher and tastes really good."

and they do this at a rate of about 1,200 15-oz loaves an hour. The braided pieces are panned and racked, with the racks rolled into a 24-rack proof box. Before baking, the challah dough pieces receive an egg wash before entering one of two Mondial Forni 30-ft triple-deck ovens.

The second bread line turns out a variety of conventional, Pullman and specialty breads — some using different sponges that have up to three hours of fermentation time. The line's Glimek single-pocket divider and cone rounder are part of the 30% new equipment installed in the bakery and can produce up to 1,000 loaves an hour. Here, the dough pieces travel through an intermediate proofer, sheeters and moulders, brought over from the old bakery, before entering the proofing and baking process.

After ambient rack cooling, the loaves head to a manually fed packaging line that features a Bettendorf-Stanford bread slicer, a new Formost Fuji horizontal bagger, a Kwik Lok bag closer and a Safeline metal detector. Nearby, slices of bread and buns are manually fed to a wrapper to be individually packaged for hospitals and other institutions.

Sweet goods and pastries — everything from non-dairy babka to croissants to rugelach — are produced on a new Fritsch Euroline lamination and pastry line located adjacent to bread production. In addition to six mixers that range from 140 qt to 300 lb, the department also uses four Rondo sheeters that could be found in any

Loaves of bread stream off the packaging line for early morning distribution throughout the neighborhoods of New York City.



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retail bakery as well as two Polin semi-automatic depositors for cakes, muffins and other batter products.

Here, bakers manually apply fillings to sheeted doughs to mass-produce a host of short-run items that are baked in five new Revent rack ovens or six existing Gemini, Revent and Sveda Dahlin ovens transferred from the previous facility.

Simply black and white

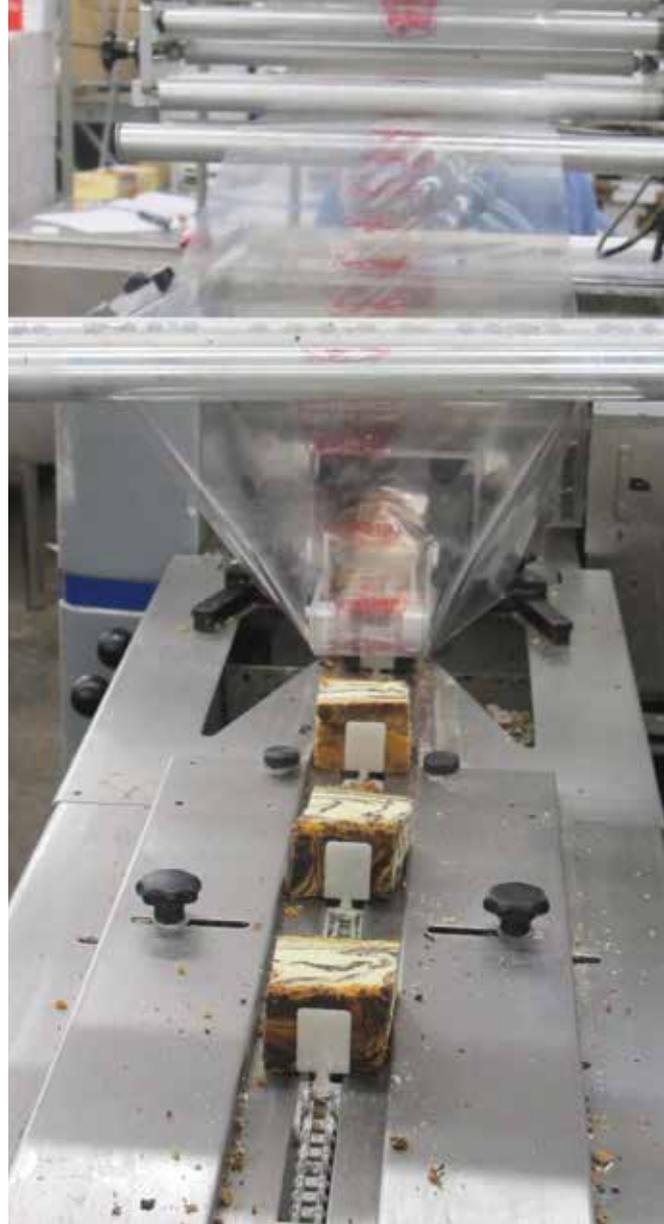
The separate temperature-controlled dessert and pastry department is actually a collection of independent work stations mass-producing hand-decorated cakes, cupcakes, eclairs and myriad other pastries and sweet goods.

In one corner, Beigel's signature Black and White cookies require a multi-step process to avoid smearing. After baking and cooling, the first half of the delicate shortbread cookie is hand-dipped in white vanilla icing, which is allowed to set before applying the black or chocolate icing to the other half.

On the back end of the department, operators manually load sliced chocolate babka into a Bosch Dobby flowrapper to individually wrap products — often at speeds up to 100 per minute — before manually applying adhesive labels.

Outside the distribution area, the bakery had to dig a slope in the parking lot to accommodate a wide variety of vehicles. The warehouse has two loading docks for semis, four for bakery route trucks and a small area

Slices of chocolate babka are individually wrapped, labeled and cartoned into family packs or larger containers for club stores and mass merchandisers.





Martin Gordon, (left), vice-president of operations, and Joseph Folger, president and head of sales, guide Beigel's Bakery as it expands into new geographic markets and different distribution channels.

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for pickup vans that serve customers along the always-crowded New York streets.

Looking toward the future, Beigel's has plenty of room to grow — 25,000 sq ft to be exact. Even at its current size, Mr. Gordon noted, the company made sure to set aside an area on the main production floor where it can install another production line when needed. The bakery also allotted space to add liquid tanks or other bulk handling systems as the business expands.

That potential volume for expansion provides the platform for sustained growth. “When we go to our larger customers, we can now show them that we have the capacity to serve them,” Mr. Folger pointed out. “We can tell them, ‘Whatever you need, we have the ability to get it to you.’”

In today's ever-changing society, so little remains black and white, but at Beigel's, it's good to know that some things simply remain the same. ●