



The Chocolate Factory serves up sweet memories

FOR NEARLY 50 YEARS, The Chocolate Factory in Golconda has been serving up homemade chocolates, ice cream and plenty of memories for generations of Southern Illinois families.

The business began in the 1970s when Linda Meherg and two friends decided to try their hand at making and selling chocolate. Their first “shop” was a camper, where they prepared chocolate and took it on the road to local clubs, church groups and other gatherings, demonstrating techniques like painting chocolate molds.

In 1977, The Chocolate Factory opened its permanent location in Pope County. What started as a relatively small operation steadily grew, and Linda eventually bought out her original partners. Over the years, the building has been expanded about five times to make room for a larger kitchen, storage space, a walk-in cooler and other additions. Today, a viewing area even allows tour groups to watch the candy-making process firsthand. The business remains a true family affair. Linda is joined by her daughters, Angela Bailey and Tina Null, and Rebecca Brandon along with other family members and employees who handle everything from making candy and ordering inventory to accounting, managing the website and serving customers.

Much of what fills The Chocolate Factory’s cases is still made in-house. The family makes its own toffee, peanut butter filling, fudge and other candy fillings, continuing the hands-on approach that has defined the business for decades.

Among its most popular treats are Terrapins, chocolate turtles filled with caramel and pecans, and Tiger Butter, a creamy combination of white chocolate, peanut butter and swirled milk chocolate. One of its most unusual

creations is a chocolate “deviled egg” that looks convincing enough to occasionally fool unsuspecting customers.

The shop has also learned to evolve with its customers. Along with longtime favorites, the family regularly introduces seasonal offerings such as caramel apples and pumpkin-flavored fudge, while newer trends like dirty sodas have also found a place on the menu. Valentine’s Day brings another specialty: freshly dipped chocolate-covered strawberries, prepared shortly before pickup to ensure they are as fresh as possible.

While the products have helped build their reputation, the family believes good service and strong relationships have been just as important to the business’s longevity. “We have a good product,” Tina said. “We sell a very good quality chocolate at an average price. And we really try to be kind to people and treat them well.”

That approach has created generations of loyal customers — and employees. The family estimates more than 90 people have worked at The Chocolate Factory over the years, many of them local teenagers getting their first job. Some former employees have even returned years

later with children of their own.

For Linda and her family, keeping the business in Pope County has always been about more than selling chocolate. It has also meant providing local jobs, supporting schools and community organizations and contributing to the place they have always called home.

And after nearly five decades, the goal for every first-time visitor remains simple: Leave happy, a little surprised by what they discovered — and preferably with some chocolate in hand.

Visit The Chocolate Factory at 990 IL-146, Golconda, IL 62938 or order online at chocolatefactoryinc.com.

