



Goya Foods celebrates 75 year anniversary, looks to future

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By Stacy Jones/The Star-Ledger



John O'Boyle/The Star-Ledger

Boxes of yellow rice moves along the production line at the Goya Foods facility in Secaucus.

When Conrad Colon started working for Goya Foods, the company only had about 30,000 square feet in Manhattan to call its own.

But in the 53 years since then, Colon has seen Goya move its headquarters from Manhattan to Brooklyn in 1958 then finally Secaucus in 1974, and grow into 4 million square feet of space. As the Latino cuisine company celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, Colon, now vice president of marketing, is celebrating his 74th birthday.

Colon first joined the company as part of its sales team and got to work with Prudencio Unanue (pronounced oo-NA-new-way), Goya's founder.

"I liked the environment, I saw a future, the company was growing," Colon said. "Now I'm still here and we're still growing."

Robert Unanue, president of Goya Foods and the founder's grandson, wants to extend the company's production into Mexico, improve distribution in the American Southwest with new facilities and invest in the people along their supply chain, like a black bean farmer in Colorado.

"We want to stay on top of the times, stay efficient and stay viable as we go forward," he said.

Although Unanue remains pragmatic in his role as the company's top executive, Goya's 75th year hasn't been without celebration. This year the company has held events at several of its locations across the country, donated 1 million pounds of food to fight hunger and announced a scholarship program for children of employees.

Goya Foods employs more than 3,500 people and saw revenue of in excess of \$1 billion last year. Although it still sells a lot of rice and beans, its product line now includes more than 1,600 products, including drinks, frozen foods and seasonings.



Staff photo by Britney Lillya

Salem County Freeholder Julie Acton, left, along with U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, second from left, poses with General Manager of Goya Foods Distribution Center in Pedricktown Jesus Hernandez second from right, and Oldmans Mayor William Miller after the toured the facility Wednesday morning.

Unanue and his cousin, Carlos Unanue, president of Goya Foods Puerto Rico, served as co-grand marshals of the New York Puerto Rican Day Parade.

"That's something we've always done as a Hispanic community," Unanue said. "In the beginning, we were an outcast group (in this country), so we started to come together."

Arlene Dávila, an anthropology professor at New York University, included Goya in a chapter of her 2008 book, "Latino Spin." She said the company's close relationship with the Latino community has contributed a lot to its success.

"They've been pioneers, sponsoring festivals and community events," she said. "What's unique about Goya is they started even

Unanue's office in Secaucus features dark floors and furniture offset by a colorful array of Goya paraphernalia, such as two three-foot cans of beans.

He maintains an open-door policy, said spokeswoman Justa Silva.

"I've seen truck drivers just walk in here to talk to him," she said.

Silva, who rejoined the company a few months ago after working elsewhere for a few years, took a job in the purchasing department after graduating from school.

"God willing, I plan to retire from here. Coming back is like coming home," she said, "because so many of the same people are still here."

The low turnover rate comes from what Unanue calls the "light and familiar" environment in the office. And that, he says, runs as deep as the heritage of Goya's founder and employees.

before the Latino market was sexy. As a result, they have these kind of grassroots, popular identities with people.”

The country’s Latino community has grown significantly and taken Goya along for the ride.

Census Bureau estimates show the Hispanic-American population grew from 13 percent in 2000 to 16 percent last year. According to bureau estimates, Hispanic-Americans could account for as much as 19 percent of the country’s population by 2020 and 30 percent by 2050.



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A bag of flavored rice moves along a production line at the Goya Foods facility in Secaucus.

Brian Todd, president of the Food Institute, a trade organization in Upper Saddle River, said Goya has also prospered off increasingly adventurous consumers eager to try new foods.

Unanue remembers his own first experience at the company. As a 10-year-old, one of his jobs was to level off jars of alcaparrado, a mixture of olives, capers and pimientos, with a spoon in a Brooklyn olive processing facility.

In those days, he admired the way his father and uncles stayed involved with the company. But Goya has grown a lot since then.

“I used to think because of the way my uncles ran it, very hands-on and involved, that was the way to do it,” Unanue said. “But now I see it’s not as important to handle everything. You have to surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.”

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