

## The Baker's Adventure

Hard work comes naturally to Timani. He moved to Canada from Lebanon to study engineering. Circumstances being what they were, Mike had no choice but to enter the workforce. He got his first job as a busboy at the Toronto Airport Hilton. Within a year of beginning work at the Hilton Mike decided to study hotel management. He held 14 different positions in 12 years with Hilton hotels. In 1983, Hilton offered Mike the opportunity to move to Saint John, New Brunswick to be part of an opening team for the new hotel and convention center and held the title of banquet manager for the new facility. He welcomed this new challenge and by 1985 he had become the food and beverage director.

In 1988, Mike decided that he was ready for a new challenge. He recognized the opportunity to introduce quality pita bread to the Atlantic region. Moncton, being the "hub city" seemed like the ideal place to take on this new venture.

In June of 1989, Mike set up a Lebanese-style 74 seat restaurant named "Fancy Pokket" on Main Street in Moncton. He also opened a 1000 square foot bakery under the same name, manufacturing pita bread on Albert Street. The operation consisted of three employees baking pita one loaf at a time. It would take a 12 hour shift to make 2000 loaves of pita at this facility 25 years ago. Within three months of its opening, Mike began introducing his product to some of the major retailers in the area. In order to meet growing demand for Fancy Pokket products, the baker moved to a 4,000 square foot location in May of 1990. Three months later, Fancy Pokket received its first large private label contract. Within the year, Mike started working on a plan to diversify his product line.

Much growth took place over the next few years and in 1995 the high demand for his products caused Mike to move to Fancy Pokket to its current location, a 24,000 square foot plant on St. George Boulevard. At this time, he also made the decision to sell his restaurants in order to focus more on the manufacturing side of the operation. He purchased a new pita production line capable of manufacturing 14,000 loaves per hour which also allowed for the production of pizza crust and flatbreads in addition to pita bread. He also purchased a bagel line which manufactured 5000 pieces per hour.

In 2001 another expansion took place adding 8,000 square feet to the facility. This expansion focused heavily on automation, adding silo systems, automatic lifts for dumping dough, a larger freezer, etc. The bagel line was replaced with newer technology which produced 12,000 bagels per hour. A new product line was introduced with the purchase of a flour tortilla line capable of producing 21,000 pieces per hour.

In 2009, Fancy's Pokket's total square footage increased to 36,000 when new traditional Lebanese pita line was introduced and the sheeting line was upgraded with newer technology capable of producing 17,000 loaves per hour. What was produced during a 12 hour shift in 1989 was now produced in less than 10 minutes.

In 2012 it became necessary to further increase freezer capacity. A sanitation room was also added

along with many equipment improvements. This most recent expansion brings the facility to 45,000 square feet and now employs 60 people.

Due to Fancy Pokket's rapid growth, Mike started brainstorming ways to increase sales at the Moncton facility and to reach an untapped market in the United States. In February 2013, Fancy Pokket USA was born. Thirteen acres of land was acquired in Lancaster, South Carolina and the new plant is currently under construction. This facility will be state of the art and dedicated gluten-free. At over 58,000 square feet, Fancy Pokket USA is expected to open its doors in 2016. It will house its own freezer space to accommodate the products manufactured in Moncton to be distributed throughout the US and vice versa for the Canadian facility.

The Moncton facility is BRC, Halal and Kosher certified and the US plant will also hold these certifications.

Over the last 26 years, Mike has overcome many challenges and has managed to continuously diversify his lines while always doing his best to exceed customer expectations with Fancy Pokket's high quality products.

Mike is the recipient of:

**2015 Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year** – Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards

**2010 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the year** for the manufacturing sector in Atlantic Canada

**2010 Excellence in Business Award** – Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards