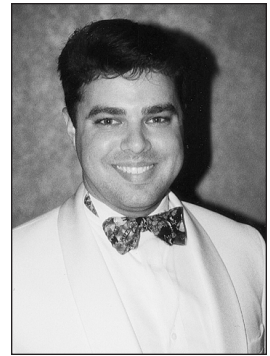


Richard Gordon, Chocolates Potpourri Ltd.

RCI board member profile



“SAMPLE LIKE CRAZY.”

That’s the advice Richard Gordon has about turning on customers to one’s latest confectionery creations. As he develops new uses for flavors and other ingredients and tries different combinations, he allows retail customers to try these confections—in small batches—before he markets them to his hotel and corporate gifts clients. This is a simple way to get valuable feedback.

Gordon didn’t always have a retail storefront. He and his mother began their confections business, Chocolates Potpourri, in the basement of their home. Now their truffles, toffees and other candies are produced in a Glenview, Illinois business location that incorporates a retail store with their kitchen/production facility.

“It’s important to educate the consumer about freshness and what cocoa content percentages mean,” Gordon says, “but they really need to taste the quality.”

In describing his company’s signature truffles, he says without hesitation that “they’re just the smoothest, creamiest . . .,” and his voice trails off. “You just have to try them.” He enjoys his craft and his business.

Sampling at food shows or networking with other food professionals keeps Gordon’s creative ideas flowing. He describes himself as both creative and technical—a career in confections is an appropriate outlet for both. He began showing his interest in food creativity when as a schoolboy he washed dishes in exchange for cooking lessons at a local French cooking school. Later he went to Michigan State University for a food science degree and then came back home to make candy.

The Gordons started selling their confections wholesale from their basement business and eventually added a mail order program. As they grew the business, they started by making toffee; they later added other equip-

ment including an enrobing line and a walk-in cooler. Gordon says, “We just kept adding products and services” until they ran out of room.

Now they offer a corporate gifts program, private label confections and custom manufacturing from their facility in Glenview.

Explaining their growth, Gordon says that six years ago, Chocolates Potpourri produced 12 different truffles and one type of toffee; now they produce 21 different truffles and three different toffees. Christmas is their busiest season. “We get help from other members of the family through that time,” he says. It’s the only way some of them see Richard and his mother during the busy-ness!

As Chocolates Potpourri works with hotels and party consultants, new ideas are tossed around and tried.

“We have monthly specials,” Gordon says, “such as macadamia truffle, piña colada truffle,” or other combinations. Other than truffles and toffees (their two biggest-selling items), the business offers dipped apricots, barks, Critters and Super Critters (chocolate-caramel-pecan confections with marshmallow).

Gordon is a new member of the board of directors of Retail Confectioners International (RCI). Membership in the organization is among several professional groups he lists in helping him in the confectionery field. He is also a member of the American Association of Candy Technologists (AACT) and the Institute for Food Technology (IFT).

For the upcoming RCI annual convention, Gordon’s list of responsibilities include preparing a Flavor and Color Applications session (in cooperation with George Preston of Preston’s Candies). He is eager to get other retail confectioners to see the benefits of new technology in the areas of colors and flavors. “As we present the information about innovations, we want it to be easy to