

# Caccioppoli Family

It was 1951 and there were no jobs for Vincenzo Caccioppoli in his hometown of Castellammare di Stabia. So he boarded The Argentina which sailed out of the Bay of Naples, in search of a way out of the poverty of postwar Italy. His journey ended at a small train station in New Hamburg, Ontario.



The Italian shipbuilder worked at a local factory, in tobacco fields, and even tried his hand at farming during those first difficult years in Canada. But it was in 1967, during Canada's hopeful centennial year, that Caccioppoli and his wife Rita would purchase a small brick house on Bridgeport Road in Waterloo and realize their dream.

They turned their living room into a grocery store and hung a sign that read, "Italian Canadian Foods." This modest enterprise grew into what is now a local landmark – Vincenzo's – a specialty food store that serves more than 9,000 customers every week.

The early years were busy ones, however, with their five children sharing their living space with the business. Rita Caccioppoli worked in the store with her baby son Carmine, while her husband worked full-time at Kaufman's Footwear. During his off hours, Vincenzo would build shelves for the pasta, canned tomatoes and olive oils, and drive to Toronto to pick up fresh Mediterranean fruits and vegetables. Their two daughters, Italia and Lucianna, eventually worked in the Bridgeport Road store for fifteen years.

Lucianna recalled once that her father received a phone call from a customer at 11 p.m. on Christmas Eve, just as they were leaving for Mass. It was a distraught mother looking for Aspirin for her sick child. A few minutes later, the grateful mother stood at the store crying and thanking the family. Lucianna also remembered the credit system, which involved taking down the name of the family in need and telling them to pay when they could.

The tiny store was packed with hanging cheeses, bins of beans, canned and bottled peppers and pickles, barrels of olives and boxes of garlic. Children will remember being offered a free slice of mortadella meat while their parents waited. In the early years, the family stocked household items, cleaners and milk, but there was such a demand for the Italian items that these were soon phased out.

The parking lot behind the Bridgeport Road store was legendary. Sometimes on Saturday mornings twelve cars would find their way into the eight-space lot, yet there was never an accident.

As the business grew, the family bought the now well-known building on Belmont Street near Union Boulevard in 1992, and renamed the store Vincenzo's in honour of their father who died of cancer that same year. The Belmont store, run by the Caccioppolis' sons Carmine and Tony, quickly thrived and a warehouse on Gage Street turned out family recipes for pasta and pasta sauces to be sold in the store. Their best-selling item is artichoke caponata, an asiago cheese spread which they sell 250 kilograms of every week.

In 2007, as the Caccioppolis celebrate four decades in business, they are preparing to move again, this time to a 12,000-square-foot space a few blocks away on Waterloo's old Bauer warehouse property at King and Caroline Streets. It is a world away, however, from the 400-square-foot store in the living room of their house forty years ago.

*Photo courtesy of Vincenzo's.*