

## Reno Gazette-Journal

Estimated printed pages: 3

June 10, 2008

**Section:** Business

**Edition:** Final

**Page:** 08A

### **Kimmmie Candy finds sweet success in Reno**

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#### SMALL-BUSINESS PROFILE

By Marian Bond

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As a former farmer from Sacramento and owner of the largest international agriculture (corn) distributor in the Middle East (Westec Inc.), Joe Dutra seems an unlikely candidate to own a candy manufacturing plant.

But Dutra, along with partners Marina Dutra and Alvaro Tomas, opened Kimmmie Candy Company's 17,000-square-foot production facility in Reno in November after having produced candy in Pusan, South Korea, since 2000.

Joe Dutra said that after 9/11, he decided to bring his operation to the United States and began looking for the ideal location: Reno.

"(Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada) got involved," Dutra said. "We liked the area, we liked the people."

Dutra said they produce millions of pounds of candy a year and ships all over the world. "I still have a facility in Pusan that supplies to our international customers," Dutra said. The candies they make are termed "pan" candies as opposed to a bar candy. They have a variety of centers, including sunflower seeds and fruits, that are coated in yogurt or chocolate.

Dutra said that in the past few years, their business has tripled. The problem he has is finding properly trained people to handle the growth. He hopes to have the plant on a 24-hour basis soon.

"Making candy is an art form," he said. "Our candy maker, Ooin Jung, is one of the best panners in the world. The process includes adding coats and coats of either chocolate or other covering, such as yogurt, to the core product. With a chocolate coating, it can take eight hours to coat a pan of centers with chocolate. If adding sugar, it can require 17 to 20 coats and several hours."

Dutra said his company would be considered a medium-sized panner with 24 stainless

steel, 42-inch pans — about 4 feet in diameter and 3 feet in depth. He said the pans look kind of like a cement mixer. Pans come in various sizes and shapes. Larger panning companies would have as many as 100 pans and smaller companies might have four or five.

Dutra got involved in candy making when he was offered the chance to buy a container of candy that had become available for the Japanese market in the Bay Area. He liked the product.

After doing some research into the industry, he found it to be a good business. It was necessary to create an image and branding, but the industry grows every year, he found. He also learned that it involved family values and traditionally companies were family-owned. Additionally, he was looking to diversify his agriculture business. Dutra had left farming in 1996.

While forming Kimmie Candy, Dutra acquired the original factory in Pusan. They now sell their candy in packaged product, bulk and private labels.

Kimmie's ChocoRocks, a chocolate chunk with a sugar/candy coating that looks like a rock, was awarded the Professional Candy Buyers' Product of the Year in 2003. Dutra and his partners will soon allow visitors to the plant to learn about candy-making.

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