

Old world values meet today's conveniences at Longo's

story *Maureen Scott*

It was 1956 and Louis St. Laurent was Prime Minister and Dwight Eisenhower was the U.S President. It was also the year that the Longo family opened their first grocery store in Toronto, with just eight employees (all family members). Today, the family-owned Canadian success story owns and operates 22 traditional grocery stores, four smaller format "The Market" by Longo's stores plus GroceryGateway.com, the leader in online sales of home delivered groceries, employing 4,800 "team members" across the GTA.

Inspired by their founders, the Longo team of food experts is dedicated to exceeding customer expectations by offering the best food experience at a great value.

Rosanne Longo says the family story really begins in Termini Imerese, Italy (north coast of Sicily) where Antonino and Rosa Longo were hardworking farmers while raising their family of six. After World War II, seeking a better life for his family, Antonino immigrated to Canada in 1949, leaving his family behind until he could find work. After serving a mandatory year as a labourer on a farm near Winnipeg, Antonino moved to Toronto and found work in a metal plant. Two years later, Rosa and the children joined Antonino to begin their



above Longo's Oakville Trafalgar circa 1982.
left Breaking ground at the Oakville Trafalgar location.

new lives in this country. By 1956, in an effort to get their father out of the harsh conditions of the metal plant, Tommy, Joe and Gus Longo opened their first fruit and vegetable market—a 1,500 square foot store on Yonge Street at Castlefield. The Longo family of eight lived above the first store. In 1967, Tommy Longo spotted a grocery store for sale at Derry and Airport Road in Mississauga and the Longo family purchased the 3,000 square foot store.

That store was expropriated to build a highway and today Toronto's International Centre occupies a large piece of land on that corner.

During the 80s the Longo chain of stores grew and added four locations with over 500 team members. "There are close to 20 people in the Longo family currently involved in the business," says Rosanne. "We are very proud of what my father and my two uncles have built and their strong sense of family values and tradition. We are proud to build on that legacy and continue their vision."

Anthony Longo, CEO and President, was once quoted as saying "We're fresh food merchants. That's what we do and that's what we do best."

Although the company has seen

substantial growth, building new stores and enhancing others, Anthony Longo's words still ring true today.

The Longo family was years ahead of the "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" craze.

"From the very beginning we have given priority to local farmers, working to build and maintain relationships built on trust," says Rosanne. "After 57 years in the business and working together with farmers over three generations, they have come to know our standards. These are relationships that were made on a handshake."

"A hallmark of the Longo's success has been exceeding customer expectations since 1956 by offering the best food experience to every customer every time. We now operate 26 stores in the GTA, including our 3 Oakville locations—Burloak, North Oakville and Southeast Oakville. But we are always mindful of our roots, providing superior quality and customer service plus everyday value for all our shoppers.

"Company growth, team member engagement, and progressive thinking continue to be at the core of the Longo's business strategy," says Anthony Longo, president and CEO.

Rosanne says. "Even though we work together every day, we still love to get together and enjoy each other's company," smiles Rosanne. "Food is what we do, but family is who we are!"

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