

Simona Faroni

Fort Walton Beach, Florida



G.S. Gelato & Desserts, Inc.

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Simona Faroni:

Over twenty years ago, Guido Tremolini and Simona Faroni came from Italy to the United States and fell in love with the area and the idea of the American dream. The journey began following a prior visit to Florida, when the couple realized they couldn't find gelato being sold anywhere.

With backgrounds in the food industry and sales/marketing, an idea ignited within them: to offer authentic Italian gelato to the country they now call home.

"We didn't speak the language. We were young, bold, and madly in love, so we decided to leave everything behind to pursue this goal," Faroni said. "We came to Northwest Florida, which is not a very large multicultural place like Miami where people speak different languages.

Way back in 1996, there really wasn't much here."

“Sometimes, at a very specific time in everyone’s life, we find ourselves feeling as though we have nothing to lose,” Faroni said. “So, in that instant, when you have a vision you think one of two thoughts, ‘What if it works?’ or ‘What if it doesn’t?’ You have to make a decision. We chose to focus on opportunities, and life changed forever.”

Fast forward, G.S. Gelato is thriving in Florida and across the country. With the courage to face the future together, Guido and Simona have embraced their entrepreneurial opportunity, having brought a little piece of Italy to the United States.

However, the journey of G.S. Gelato wasn’t always sweet. In the very beginning, they faced a major challenge that could have brought everything to a halt.

Keeping a Competitive Edge

“We imported our equipment from Italy, which was sold to us by the leading manufacturers of gelato equipment in Italy,” Faroni said. “But when the department came for final inspection, they said to us, ‘What do you think you are going to do? This equipment is not approved.’ It didn’t exist in the frozen dessert book for the state of Florida.”

Tremolini and Faroni were given two options: either they buy new equipment or pack their bags and travel back to Italy.

“At that time, in order to create gelato with pure authenticity, we needed certain important components, mainly the equipment from Italy. So, at the time, there was really not much hope.” she said.

With persistence in their heart and perseverance to achieve their dream, Tremolini and Faroni knew they couldn't give up when they had only just begun.

"We started to learn to language. We went to school at night, and then found some local engineers who were willing to help us," she said. "We went to the FDA and they pretty much opened up a branch just for us, helping to make the necessary modifications to approve this equipment."

After a long 14 months of hard work, facing unrelenting obstacles, trials and tribulations, the equipment was approved by both the FDA and the Department of Agriculture. G.S. Gelato ("G" for Guido, "S" for Simona) became the first manufacturer of authentic, artisanal Gelato and Sorbet in the United States of America.

The next challenge they encountered was selling their product to a country that did not know what gelato was. The first step in creating a market that didn't exist, for G.S. Gelato, was education.

"I started going out locally and driving our little ice cream truck, giving samples to local chefs. Two months later we got a call from U.S. Foods who said they wanted to start distributing our product because they saw we had sold to all the local restaurants. In the meantime, since it was a continuous struggle that no one really knew what gelato was, we started up a small café," she said. "People loved the product and the first store was successful from day one. We opened up three more stores which were really keeping G.S. Gelato alive."

An Unexpected Knock at The Door

It wasn't until 2005 that an unexpected knock came to the door of G.S. Gelato.

"Olive Garden reached out and said tell us about gelato," Faroni said. "By the end of 2005, we started supplying for all the Olive Garden restaurants which was a huge turning point for us."

Going from running a few cafes and local restaurants to providing gelato for Olive Garden restaurants across the country, they were quickly outgrowing their 1,000 square foot space.

"At that time, the real estate market was still pretty hot, so it was very difficult to find a suitable location to expand in the area. We found one that used to be an old metal recycling facility; it was just a gloomy place," she said. "But my husband is a man of a vision, so he said, 'yes, we can do it here.'"

"It took one year to renovate and get the place prepared, so from 1,000 square feet we moved into about 30,000 square feet which was a huge leap of faith. The investment and the mortgage were really hefty compared to where we were coming from, but we always live in the realm of opportunities."

"So, I went out to sell more. We started with retail in the supermarkets," Faroni said. One of our specialties that resonates within the culture of the company is customization, providing special products and services. Because of this, we drew in clients that wanted to have these tailored private label products."

“Today, we are the leaders in the private label gelato space, supplying almost all the retail supermarket chains in the country as well as foodservice. G.S. Gelato keeps growing and growing. This is our passion and our love,” she said.

Persevering through a new culture, language barriers and equipment troubles, just to name a few, Guido and Simona pledged from the very beginning to never give up.

“There have been many moments where naturally we could say this is not going to work; it’s better if we call it quits. But we held our vision because we knew and felt with unwavering faith that gelato was going to be the evolution of the ice cream industry,” she said. “So instead of focusing on the process we focused on the outcome, and that made the process so much more enjoyable with a positive outlook.”

Looking back on the last 20+ years of G.S. Gelato, Faroni laughed when asked if there was anything she knows now that she wished she knew back then. With the same tenacious attitude that brought Italian gelato to the United States, Faroni said, “It’s probably better if we didn’t know.”

“Otherwise, we would have placed limitations in our minds. We would have loved to know what mistakes not to make, but that’s the inevitable course of a growing business,” she said.

“I think you really grow and become stronger when you step out of your comfort zone.”

“At that time, we knew just enough of what we were supposed to know

to embark on this journey.”

Taking Business to The Next Level

“G.S. Gelato is an industrial production with a boutique mentality.”

With the ability to serve to the smallest of restaurants and the largest chain supermarkets, Faroni believes the key to G.S. Gelato’s success is their customization.

“We are unique because we provide custom tailored product for all our clients. We could do the small, local organic store with the entire level of customization that the large retailers have,” she said.

“Each client has different requirements, whether it’s a very low price point on the shelf or a very high quality on the shelf, or organic, or non-dairy. I think the customization component we bring to the table and the knowledge of the product and its ingredients we have is one of our greatest strengths.”

Faroni says they are frequently asked by their customers to create products that are superior to the leading brands on the market. With a mindset driven by innovation, these challenges require continuous education, testing new ingredients and evolving to offer the most pliable solutions and services.

“We provide premium quality gelato and sorbet for a more affordable price because of the extensive research and development we put into our products,” Faroni said. “We have total freedom in formulating any product with any flavor profile, based on client’s desires, necessities,

and goals.”

As for their plans in the upcoming years, Faroni is looking forward to their continual growth and what the future holds.

“We constantly remain on the cutting edge of innovation and there is not one year where we don’t have a planned expansion in areas of the company,” she said.

“The customization capabilities are going to continue and we’re getting stronger and stronger in the retail and foodservice industries. It’s not just about gelato or sorbet anymore, but other related products, like gluten free and dairy free products.”

Driven by a motto of “In the end, gelato will be just gelato, but with passion, it is G.S. Gelato,” Faroni and her husband are not the only ones who share that drive; their employees do as well.

“Our core team really lives, breathes and acts with a can-do attitude and mentality,” she said. “You may have noticed in past years that the food industry has changed dramatically, so you have to stay up to date with all the rules, regulations, ingredients, trends and consumer demands. The team is very engaged in everyday challenges and opportunities.”

“The the level of loyalty and pride that resides in the company and among the employees is wonderful, absolutely wonderful,” she said.

“The team spirit of working in the realm of possibility is part of our energy here.”

What it Means to Be a Florida Companies to Watch Honoree

G.S. Gelato was selected as an honoree for this year's Florida Companies to Watch, which recognizes second-stage companies located in Florida. Honorees demonstrate high performance, growth and innovation in the market place.

With their roots back in Italy, Faroni says it's a great honor to be recognized as an honoree in their home away from home.

"We have put our hearts and souls into the company for the last 20 years and have been acknowledged and recognized with many different awards," she said. "For us, Florida is home. So when we received the announcement that we were one of the 50 companies selected, for me and my husband it was very moving."

"I don't think I'll ever forget back in 1996 when we moved from Italy. Florida was where we decided to put our second roots and make it our home. Everything was so unknown and the dream was so vivid but we had nothing," said Faroni.

"The fact that many years later, we were recognized as one of the companies to watch in Florida is really humbling and really touching for us."

Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

Like many entrepreneurs, Guido and Simona faced their share of challenges on their path to success. With what they've overcome and learned along the way, Faroni shared a few bits of wisdom to those following their own entrepreneurial journey.

“Never give up. The only time you fail is when you give up,” she said.

If you have a dream, you can achieve it. If you can hold it in your mind, you can hold it in your hands. It’s not easy, but if you don’t give up and you focus on the outcome rather than the process, anything you set in your mind can be achieved.”

Notable Community Involvement

G.S. Gelato is a dedicated supporter of local and national organizations like the Boys & Girls Club of America, churches, hospitals, shelters and military organizations. After the devastating destruction created by Hurricane Michael this fall, the company has also come together to collect donations and supplies to help those affected.

Awards and Recognition

