

D.D.P reaches 40-year milestone

It's 40 years this year since Direct Delivered Produce Ltd (D.D.P) opened on the Market and Managing Director Paul Grimshaw says the family firm has stood true to its principles from day one.

The business was set up by Paul's father Sham, who had previously worked in the Market at wholesalers Mack & Edwards and latterly DD Pankhurst. Sham found that as he stopped off on his drive home up the A40 each day, a growing number of catering and retail establishments were keen for him to deliver fresh produce to them.

"At the time, the Market was at least 80% wholesale and maybe 20% catering and the vast majority of smaller restaurants from outside London would come up with their own vans and buy in the Market," says Paul. "D.D.P was set up with a unit (B8) in the Market and a warehouse in Chesham, Bucks, and from day one, supplied direct to local schools, restaurants, contract caterers and retailers. We were one of the first firms to do that out of NCGM and our 'fleet' was one noisy, blue Volkswagen van with the engine in the back, in which dad delivered produce on his way home. He plotted his route home by the deliveries he had to make."

“ D.D.P has been a Grimshaw family affair from day one, both at the Market and at home

Customers as diverse as Chalfont Food Hall, Middlesex Polytechnic, Ashridge Management College and Planet Hollywood were amongst the earliest regular destinations for that D.D.P van, until the orders outgrew its capacity. "Our second vehicle was a big lorry that we could get more stuff on," says Paul. "We got it sign-written, then the driver managed to wedge it under the bridge at Berkhamsted station on its first day on the road. It brought the town to a stand-still for much of the day and the scrape marks are there to this day underneath the bridge!"

Maybe it was the lack of road awareness of his driver that swayed Sham's focus to a customer base closer to the Market. "Dad recognised in time that delivering in London was easier than to the surrounding counties and built up a healthy central London customer base. We quickly moved into the higher-class establishments, with retail customers including Harrods, several



high-end restaurants and hotels, the House of Lords and eventually the Royal Households, for which the company was awarded Royal Warrants and still holds them today, over 25 years later," says Paul.

Family affair

D.D.P has been a Grimshaw family affair from day one, both at the Market and at home. Paul remembers the daily routine of his mum, Carole, in the late 1980s being pretty busy, to say the least. "I don't know how she did it really," he recalls. "She'd get up at 2am and wake dad and my brother Kevin up. By 3am, she'd have started packing fruit lunch boxes of bananas, apples, satsumas and grapes, which we did for Selfridges and a few other retailers. I didn't come to work at the Market until 2002, so in those days she'd wake me up for work at 7am, then carry on with the day's packing, before doing some invoicing before dad and my brother came home at lunchtime. Mum would then do some more paperwork, make dinner, do the ironing and finish off the evening with some more paperwork!"

"She only had four hours sleep before starting it all again. Whatever it was that needed doing, that never mattered – she

was happy to do it." In time, special packed nuts were also made up at home by Carole, using similar foot-pedal machines. "My dad actually went to the Amazon in Brazil to secure regular nut supply – there were no phones and no internet, he left with a small holdall containing a couple of shirts and a thick suit made from wool!" Paul laughs.

As for Paul, he didn't follow brother Kevin into the firm straight from school. "I've always been part of it, of course, and used to work in the market while growing up," he says. "I remember coming in to grade apples during the night, for example, but by the time I was in my 20s, the hours didn't really fit my social life!"

Fitting his social life around the hours of work became more palatable as he reached his 30s though. "I was more suited to Market life by the time I entered the business," he adds. "Things had begun to modernise here, which suited me too. However, while we



Left: Paul models the famous D.D.P barrow, which is often seen at customer events

Above: Paul with Paresh Shah, his fellow Director
Top right: Hard-working Carole, on the firm's stand at the National Fruit Show
Right: Dad Sham, right, discusses bikes and fruit and vegetables with former Conservative Party Chairman Norman Tebbit

embrace modern technology and everything that goes hand in hand with that, we have never lost regard for our past as that's what got us here in the first place."

It's pretty evident that the entire Grimshaw family has put its heart and soul into the business and that family has also increased its number through a series of dedicated and passionate people who have worked for them across the years. Director Paresh Shah has been with the company for more than 25 years, while fellow director Muku, buyer Bala and packer extraordinaire Siva have also progressed through the ranks over many years of service. "We've always believed in giving people the opportunity to advance," says Paul. "They have not just become highly skilled and experienced members of our team, they have become part of our family too and it's been so good to watch their own families grow while they've worked with us."

Market value

D.D.P has moved twice within the Market and is now housed in units B59-64. Being at New Covent Garden has been integral to D.D.P's success, says Paul. "The relationships we have here are absolutely crucial. We have the same trusted supply base in the Market that we've always had, many of the people will have worked with us right from the start and without them we simply wouldn't have been able to do what we've done," he adds.

Direct relationships with suppliers have blossomed over the years too and as well as those Brazilian nuts back in the day, the firm has been a big advocate for British, whenever possible. "We've championed British produce right from the get-go and that will never change. We have some fantastic British suppliers, our customers love high-quality homegrown product and we're totally committed to them. The world and its weather are becoming harder to predict, of



course, and one of our stock replies to longer term pricing questions, when asked, is 'I don't know what I'm having for my lunch today, never mind the price of broccoli in three weeks!'

"We've always stuck to what we do best. From day one, we have maintained a dogged determination to treat every order as if it's our first. We still do and it's the dedication we have to supplying the best quality and delivering the best customer service that have helped us to achieve Royal Warrants and count customers like Coughlans, who we have served for 30 years, as friends. We have contract catering customers that cater for 1,000+ people three times a day and they have a lot of competition, so the quality has to be right up there, as well as our ability to deliver what they need, whenever they need it."

Sadly, Sham and Kevin are no longer with us, but the D.D.P name and their work ethic live on.