

# (201)

## THE FOOD ISSUE

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# Bring Home the Bread

Ridgefield's Toufayan Bakeries brings fresh taste to families across the U.S.

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER L. NELSON

**W**hile there's no shortage of bakeries in Bergen County, you may not realize that Ridgefield happens to be home of one of the largest privately-held specialty bread bakeries in the United States: Toufayan Bakeries.

The Toufayan story begins back in 1926 with the opening of their first shop. More than 90 years later, the bakery is still family-owned, and the Toufayan name has become synonymous with everything from flatbreads to pitas to bagels.

"Our family name is on every single package, and that's why quality is probably the most important thing that we – as a family and as bakers – deem most important," says Karen Toufayan, the company's vice president of marketing and sales, who joined the family business two decades ago.

She works alongside her brother, Greg, and sister, Kristine, who both joined the family business right out of college.

The Toufayan Bakeries story began when their grandfather, Haroutoun, fled the violence that was plaguing his Armenian homeland to immigrate to Egypt. There he met his wife and started a bakery. At the age of 65, he brought their small bakery to the United States with the help of his son, Harry, who still remains closely involved in the day-to-day operations. After a few years, the bakery moved from its original location of West New York to Bergen County.

"Our original product was pita bread – a staple in any Middle Eastern household – and it was the first bakery to bring pita bread into mainstream supermarkets," Karen says. "About 40 years ago, my dad was at a supermarket deli case waiting for cold cuts when he thought it would be a perfect place to grab a package of pita bread." >

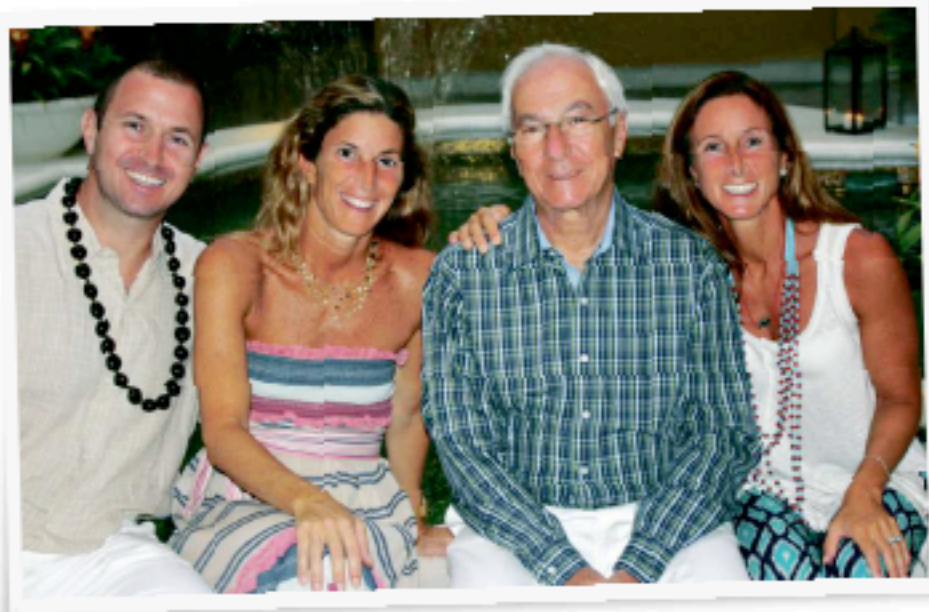


**BORN TO BAKE**  
(Opposite page)  
Toufayan Bakeries founder Haroutoun Toufayan with his wife, Siranoush, in the Ridgefield factory in 1975.



COURTESY OF BOLIVIAN





**A FAMILY THAT BAKES TOGETHER STAYS TOGETHER**

The Toufayan family (pictured, left to right), Greg Toufayan, vice president of production; Kristine Toufayan, vice president of finance; Harry Toufayan, president and owner; and Karen Toufayan, vice president of marketing and sales, keep their bond strong outside of the business as well, including family vacations.

Operating under the slogan, “families have been relyin’ on the fresh taste of Toufayan,” today, Toufayan Bakeries encompasses its corporate headquarters and pita plant in Ridgeland in addition to two bakeries in Orlando and Plant City, Fla. The company produces more than 100 varieties of baked goods every day under the careful watch of the third generation of Toufayans.

Their product lines run the gamut, from pitas to flatbreads and wraps, breadsticks, buns, cookies, bagels, and much more.

“Through the talented and dedicated people in our company, I enjoy taking ideas and commercializing them into successful products that people really enjoy,” says Greg Toufayan, chief operations officer for the company.

The family has become known for its hands-on involvement in their baked goods, from the original idea for mini croissants or Pisettes until the time it ends up in your toaster oven. They oversee every step of the manufacturing process, including ingredient sourcing, production, baking, packaging, and distribution.

“What makes any company unique is the people working for and leading the company...our own individual beliefs, customs, and habits tend to work themselves into the products, as well as the ways in which we make and market those products,” Greg says.

Among the company’s most popular innovations are their lines of product options designed to meet specific consumer needs, like low-carb bagels or gluten-free wraps in varieties ranging from 100 percent whole wheat to specialty flavors like garden vegetable.

“My dad has always been very innovative; he’d do a lot of traveling to the Middle East and Europe and come back with all kinds of ideas – 15 years ago, nobody knew what Focaccia bread was, but we were one of the first to bring it to supermarkets,” she recalls.

**T**hese days, the younger Toufayans make it their mission to respond to trends and consumer demands when developing new products. Kristine’s preference for a scooped-out bagel at a deli shop while the family was vacationing together became the inspiration for a line of 100-calorie Smart Bagels; the company also offers a line of Smart Pockets: thinner, stufferable pita breads. The Toufayan team also puts their heads together to remain as efficient as possible and keep costs down for their customers.

“We’re geared towards healthier, better-for-you bakery products that are not going to break the bank,” says Greg. Their whole wheat pita, for example, retails approximately 30 to 40 percent cheaper than many other brands.

“We still focus very closely on manufacturing and staying fast and efficient,” he adds. “We find that paying attention to detail and striving to make sure every piece is made right the first time helps our quality assurance department and brings costs down.”

The family infuses their passion for health and fitness into their products, and do their part to ensure that anyone can enjoy bread and baked goods regardless of their dietary needs or preferences.

“Not only are we adamant about baking with the freshest, most natural ingredients,

but our products are rich in grains and fiber and other nutrients,” Karen says. “Customers write to us every day to thank us for providing them with healthier or gluten-free options that allow them to enjoy bread again.”

When they’re not developing the latest and greatest in good-for-you baked goods, the Toufayans are active in their local communities – and the first to jump to action to help those in need.

“I know my dad feels so appreciative to live and work in this country, and has always been compelled to do his part to give back,” Karen says. Whether it’s sending truckloads of baked goods to those impacted by Hurricane Sandy, donating healthy snacks to local schools, or partnering with organizations like the National MS Society or American Red Cross, the Toufayans are passionate about doing what they can to give back to the community. “If my family needed help, I would certainly hope someone in a better position would help us,” Greg explains.

Looking ahead, the company continues to grow by blending new innovation with a commitment to fresh, wholesome ingredients – and all while infusing their products with the old world recipes upon which the company was founded. They’re working to build brand awareness of the company and yet still remain closely connected to their customers and their needs.

“I think one of the things customers like about us is that we’re a family; we’re tight-knit, we work well together, and if they need anything, they know they can call me or my brother or my sister or our dad and we will take care of them,” she says. ■

COURTESY OF TOUFAYAN