



## LiDestri thanks workers with extra week's pay

Jim Stinson – Staff writer

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More than 45 years ago, Giovanni LiDestri was in 10th grade and borrowing money from his older brother, who worked for the Cantisano family at Ragu Foods in Rochester.

The older brother decided he was tired of being a lender and told Giovanni to get over to the Ragu plant and sign up for a part-time job.

On Thursday, Giovanni LiDestri — who rose from that humble start to run his own company, LiDestri Foods Inc. — gave his more than 700 employees an extra week's pay to celebrate his upcoming induction into the Rochester Business Hall of Fame.

LiDestri, a Sicilian immigrant, said it's the workers who deserve the recognition. "It's not about me, I really believe that," he said. "We've been very blessed. (The company) is actually growing."

The extra \$500,000 outlay in payroll went to employees who work at the headquarters plant in Fairport, as well as those at plants in Dundee, Yates County; Pennsauken, N.J.; and Fresno, Calif.

In a memo to employees, LiDestri wrote: "No, we did not have a computer glitch. ... You do all the hard work."

The company specializes in making sauces, salsas, dips and other products, many for private labels such as Wegmans. LiDestri said the company produces 2 million jars a day.

LiDestri Foods was in the news earlier this week when it said it hopes to buy a vacant Eastman Kodak Co. building in Greece and renovate it for use as a production site and innovation center. The County of Monroe Industrial Development Agency approved incentives for the deal on Tuesday, but LiDestri said it needs additional help from the state before proceeding.

"This (incentive application) to me is a solid request," Sandy Parker, CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance, said Thursday.

Parker said LiDestri's industry has been insulated from the recession as shoppers flock to pastas and sauces for low-cost meals at home. Despite that, Parker said she was surprised by LiDestri's extra-pay gesture, adding that it was beyond the type of bonus some companies give.

The local Business Hall of Fame, at the Rochester Museum and Science

Center, is sponsored by Junior Achievement of Rochester and *Rochester Business Journal*.

Giovanni LiDestri, though he has lived in the Rochester area most of his life, was born in Tusa, Sicily, a tiny coastal town between the cities of Palermo and Messina. His family moved to the United States in the 1960s.

The company he now owns was founded in 1975 by Ralph Cantisano, whose family also had started Ragu Foods, maker of Ragu sauce. LiDestri worked his way up at Cantisano Foods and, when Cantisano retired in 2002, bought all the company's stock. The name was changed the following year.

LiDestri lives in Victor but said he has bought a property on East Avenue near the Little Theatre where he will soon make his main home with his wife, Cindy.

[JFSTINSO@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:JFSTINSO@DemocratandChronicle.com)