



Candy Season

BY JENNIFER NELSON

The sweet aroma of sugar wafts over you as you walk through the door. People bustle about, waiting excitedly for a tour. Your eyes glimpse a colorful display of candy, and your mouth waters before you even know what flavor it is.

Your mind wanders back to that time when you were a kid, when giddy excitement was so common, the kind of excitement where you can hardly stand still, the kind that produces the biggest grin you've ever seen, the kind you feel when you've walked into a land of candy.

This is Hammond's Candies in Denver, where quality is a top priority. Here, "old fashioned" is a positive idea and family members work side by side, often as part of a long tradition. It's a place where tours are free and the beautiful candy is plentiful. All of this makes you feel like a kid in a candy store. Except you're not just any kid, but a kid with a refined palate who can taste the difference in these exquisite confections.

The difference, in this case, is in the old-fashioned way of making the candy. Each piece is hand made, carefully prepared by cooks who've worked hard to learn the unique techniques. Hours of dedication have been spent in perfecting this craft, finally resulting in batch after perfect batch as the process becomes second nature.

During a tour of the factory, you can often watch various cooks, including Dave Camp, the master cook, create candy canes. Each time he works, it's clear that his seven years at Hammond's has translated into a perfect technique of pulling and twisting and cutting the candy. It looks so easy, so fluid, so simple to perform the techniques he learned from the Hammond's family. Ross Chism, Hammond's

production and purchasing manager, explains that making Hammond's candy is truly an art form.

Dave's type of art begins in a large cauldron-like copper kettle with three ingredients — sugar, corn syrup and water — that are heated to around 330 degrees. The mixture, called "clear," is then poured onto a steel slab, where it slowly cools while Dave mixes and kneads it. As the clear cools, Dave adds deep reds and greens to the candy, saturating parts of the mixture with vibrant color.

He then moves the batch to the puller, where air is worked into the candy, helping to tone down the color. At this point, Dave adds the peppermint flavor to a piece of the batch. The scent

is so strong that it can make your eyes water as it fills the large kitchen, bringing with it memories of candy canes at Christmas.

The batch is then moved to the blocking table, where it is shaped into a giant, 70-pound log while nearby natural gas flames keep the candy around 240 degrees.

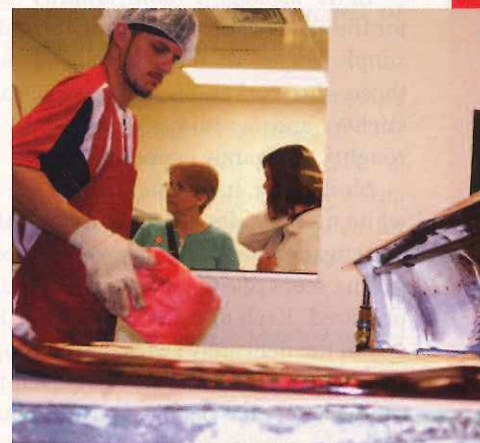
Dave then whisks the log over to the batch roller, which also has flames to keep the candy warm. The roller turns the candy log, softening and stretching it. Dave pulls and stretches and twists the log. The diameter stretches smaller and smaller until it resembles a rope as he rubs it with his cotton-gloved hands, creating perfect glossy stripes. His decisive cuts craft the perfect candy strips, and an assistant quickly and artfully bends the hook in the canes. Then, off the candy canes go via a conveyor belt to be packaged.



Master Cook Dave Camp mixes and kneads the candy mixture as it slowly cools.



Jose Padilla adds flavor to the candy while it's on the puller.



At the blocking table, Jose creates a giant candy jacket to surround the flavorful center of the candy cane.



Keo transfers the 70-pound log to the batch roller to be stretched and pulled.

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The 2006 Hammond's Candies employees take a break from their sweet job.

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In the packaging room, another team of workers creates the finishing touches for the candy canes. Following the old-fashioned method, the packaging remains simple to show off the beautiful colors and designs. As with the rest of the process, those who work in packaging also do everything by hand, tying ribbons, placing stickers and fastidiously packaging boxes. A 70-pound batch of candy makes roughly 500 candy canes.

Meanwhile, in another part of the kitchen, cooks pour entire tables of creamy, white marshmallow fluff. Once cut, these confections are coated with cinnamon and sugar or covered in heavenly chocolate. From another conveyor belt, the intoxicating scent of chocolate drifts through the air as chocolate-covered cherries are prepared. Each of these creations is hand made, right down to using a finger to create the delicately swirled "c" on top of the chocolate-covered cherries.

Things at Hammond's have been this way for quite a while. Even though the candy factory has changed locations and introduced new treats, its employees still make the candy with the same recipes and techniques used in 1920 when Carl T. Hammond Sr. opened his factory in Denver. The equipment that's used today, such as the puller, batch roller and steel slabs, are from the era when Carl began using them. Only a few machines are newer than the 1950s. The halls lining the kitchen resemble a museum, with antique machines waiting to step in should one of their counterparts break down.

Carl began this tradition of candy making with Honey Kokos, a delicious confection of chocolate-covered coconut surrounding a crème in the middle that is still sold at Hammond's. His son, Carl T. (Tom) Hammond Jr. and wife, June, eventually took over the factory, expanding the product line and moving the factory to a larger location. Continuing the family tradition, Tom's son-in-law, Emery Dorsey IV, became a master candy maker. Even though the original Hammond's family isn't involved today, the company is still a family within itself.

Mickey Theuambounmy and Linda Kindall, who have been with Hammond's since the 1980s, were both hired by Tom. The two women remember when the factory truly resembled the "I Love Lucy" show. They were always busy, doing everything from cooking and packaging to taking special orders and running the retail store. They would scurry back and forth trying to make a batch of candy and then fill a customer's order. Linda remembers an order where a gentleman wanted a diamond ring placed in the center of a chocolate for his sweetheart. Mickey and Linda had to run to the kitchen with the ring and stuff it in a fresh piece of



The 70-pound log is twisted and pulled into the perfect candy cane size.



Evelyn Rosales quickly bends the crook into the cane, sending it down the conveyor belt to be packaged.



The staff members in the packaging area add simple, elegant boxes, bags and ribbons before the candy is sent to the warehouse for shipping or to the retail store.



Mickey Theuambounmy (left) and Linda Kindall, longtime friends and Hammond's employees.



Ross Chism, production and purchasing manager at Hammond's Candies.

candy. They laughed as they reminisced about their time at Hammond's.

Mickey, who used to work as a cook, said that her favorite item to make was candy canes. Linda quickly piped up to say that Mickey was really good at it, too. Both agree that Hammond's is a great place to work, explaining that the family atmosphere is very much alive. Many of their family and friends work with them now or have worked with them over the years.

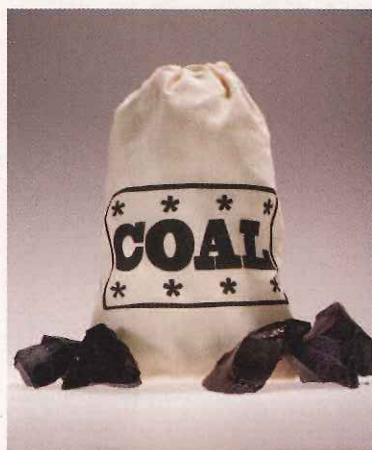
These women are just two of the approximately 100 employees who work at Hammond's. Their longevity at the company clearly shows the fantastic atmosphere that exists where they make quality candy and the company is dedicated to its employees. "The people here are the key to everything," Ross says. "Our niche is to make everything by hand, so without the employees, we would have nothing. We have many employees now, but we still focus on having small-company values."

And it works for them. Just nine years ago the company had fewer than 10 employees. This year, Hammond's, now located at 5735 North Washington Street in Denver, will do approximately \$6 million in business, creating around 900,000 candy canes. Hammond's also has more than 300 varieties of its candy, including traditional candy canes, scrumptious chocolates, hard candies, filled candies and gooey marshmallows.

And Hammond's is still coming out with new confections. Try the backpacker's weatherproof, all-organic, wax-covered fudge. Just peel off the wax and enjoy a perfect, un-melted treat. Or take a handful of candy from the all-natural product line, which uses natural colors and flavors found in food products instead of certified dyes. (The dyes are the only unnatural part of any of Hammond's candy.) And be on the lookout for chocolate mint balls, delicious chocolate-covered, chocolate-filled peppermint candy, which can be found in Coldwater Creek stores.

But as Ross says, "If you're looking for something healthy and good for you, you've come to the wrong place." But, this is certainly the right place to satisfy those sweet cravings. It's a great place to enjoy being a kid in a candy store.

Jennifer Nelson is the editorial assistant for Colorado Country Life. She now loves to satisfy her sweet tooth with a treat (or two or three) from Hammond's Candies, which is conveniently a block away from the office.



Naughty or Nice

Hammond's Candies offers sweet treats reminiscent of a Christmas long ago

- **Candy coal** — If you know someone who's been naughty this year, leave them with coal as their only gift — candy coal, that is. Sold in a cotton bag, this coal will turn your mouth a deep blue color from the harmless, certified dye, so you'll know exactly who's been snacking.
- **Old-Fashioned Drops** — Made just like they were in the 1920s, these flavored candy drops are packaged in an old-fashioned tin. Flavors include horehound, lemon, ginger, cinnamon, root beer, licorice and butterscotch.
- **Ribbon candy** — The richly-colored candy is perfectly shaped into a strip and fed through a crimper to create this delicate treat. Enjoy flavors such as cinnamon, peppermint, clove, cherry and all-natural mint.

You can purchase Hammond's Candies online at www.hammondscandies.com (where you can also find a list of retail locations in your area), at the Hammond's Candies factory at 5735 N. Washington Street, Denver, CO 80216 and by calling 888-226-3999. Free tours are available Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tours are every 20 minutes; call for groups of 10 or more.



To win a collection of Hammond's Candies, go to www.coloradocountrylife.coop and click on Contests by December 12.