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Peter Condakes Company Inc. has plenty to be thankful for

By

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Heading toward the final weeks of what has been a very strange and difficult year, Peter Condakes Company Inc. is finding a lot to be thankful for.

“I do have to say that I think the company was quite fortunate in how things have come about, mostly

because of the resourcefulness of our customers,” said Peter John Condakes, president and co-owner of the Chelsea, MA-based company. “When the pandemic first hit in March, those first two weeks were pretty challenging, but then the customers pivoted amazingly.”

Obviously, people have been cooking a lot more at home while eating out less, and with about 70 percent of Peter Condakes Company’s business related to foodservice, there was a lot of concern back in March.

“The foodservice people — even before the government started doing the food boxes — really pivoted and started doing more direct-to-customer deliveries, to families, to homes, to individuals, and they made a go of it for themselves,” Condakes said. “That helped during late spring and summer. I’m wondering what the winter is going to bring, particularly in this area, where you can’t be outside, like most of the country. It hasn’t been perfect by any stretch, but we have been very fortunate.”

No doubt that the company has experienced some rough days this year, including when they had to throw away some produce.

“Obviously, we had an inventory that, all of a sudden, wasn’t needed anymore. But our customers pivoted, we adjusted our inventories to what it looked like they were buying,” Condakes said. “I think it was a confluence of a lot of small and big things, all at the same time, that somehow the vast majority of us in the market and our customers are surviving. It may not be perfect but we’re surviving.”

The company got its start when its founder, Peter J. Condakes, a newly arrived immigrant from Greece, started selling fruits and vegetables from a cart in Boston in 1900. His extraordinary work ethic led to him establishing a location on the city’s old Commercial Street.

By the 1950s, the company had become a major player in Boston’s produce scene, and Condakes’ descendants continued his proud tradition.

With tomatoes being the company’s main product, Condakes isn’t expecting to get a big boost during Thanksgiving, but he does believe Christmas should see good sales.

Overall, though, the holiday season promises to be something to celebrate in a year where there hasn’t been much to celebrate. Even if families aren’t gathering for dinners featuring 15 to 20 people, people are sure to be cooking on a smaller scale.

“One way or another people are going to eat on Thanksgiving,” Condakes said. “They may not be having big gatherings, but it could be that more is sold because people don’t know how to cook for a smaller group. I don’t have a good feel for it, but I don’t think there’s going to be a gigantic reduction in produce consumed, particularly of the Thanksgiving staples.”

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