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Produce companies enjoy big business at New England Produce Center

By

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The New England Produce Center was built in 1968 in Chelsea, MA, in response to the increased demand for high-quality produce items by the local retailers and restaurants in the Boston area. Until that time, the historic Faneuil Hall, which was created in 1736, was the home for farmers looking to

sell fruits and vegetables in the area.

The objective of the New England Produce Center is to supply the highest quality fresh fruits and vegetables —as well as agriculturally related items — to wholesalers, retailers and foodservice customers serving the more than 8 million people located in and around the area.

Many of the companies that call the Produce Center home have been there since the beginning and have seen growth thanks to the advancements of the market.

Steven Piazza, managing partner for Community-Suffolk Inc., calls Boston a “foodie” town, with different ethnic restaurants serving a diverse population.

“It’s also a seaport and a healthy town,” he said. “I think a lot of people want to eat right and there’s a lot of younger professionals that are very health conscious. That makes it great for the produce business.”

Peter John Condakes, president and co-owner of Peter Condakes Company Inc., said the secret to success in Boston is to be very attuned to each individual customers’ wants and needs.

“I don’t think that’s a whole lot different from anywhere else, but I do have to say that I think the demand for quality product is very much in evidence here,” he said. “I think some things that might make do in certain areas of the country don’t make do here.”

He sees a lot of change happening in the Boston produce industry these days.

“In this area, there were two wholesale markets right next door to each other, and last November, the Boston Market Terminal was sold to a developer and the tenants in there — some of them have until the end of September and the last few until the end of the year to leave,” Condakes said. “So there’s been some consolidation, there have been a couple of companies that have gotten out of business here, sold their space to others from Boston Market Terminal, and it’s going to make things interesting — for some commodities there are going to be fewer suppliers, for others there will be the same number of suppliers.”

Patrick Burke, co-owner and sales and purchasing representative for Garden Fresh Salad Co., which operates in the New England Produce Center, said because the city is compact, with lots of restaurants in a small area, Boston’s food scene thrives.

“We have a lot of loyal customers in the area who will give us a shot rather than take national contracts,” he said. “It’s the loyalty of those customers that keep us strong and the industry strong.”

He feels companies at the Produce Center have good relationships with one another, and even though it’s a competitive business, they get through things together — such as the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When it comes down to it, we all bond together,” Burke said. “We have our own little community down here and we all respect each other.”

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