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Mr. Greens celebrates 10th anniversary

By

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Over its 10-year history, foodservice specialist Mr. Greens Produce Inc. has moved four times in South Florida to accommodate the tremendous growth it has realized.

On September 21, 2021, it celebrated its 10th anniversary and held a grand opening event for its latest company headquarters, which is a state-of-the-art, 158,000-square-foot facility in Miami. CEO Nick Politis, who is one of the owners of the operation, told *The Produce News* that the company actually moved into the facility in January, but the celebration was delayed to coincide with its August



anniversary.

During its decade-long history, Mr. Greens has specialized in produce for the foodservice trade including restaurants, hotels and country clubs. It offers whole commodities as well as many different specialty cuts such as Julienned carrots and diced onions. In recent years, it has also expanded its product line to include dairy, cheeses, charcuterie board meats, micro and flower herbs, dry goods and more.

With its new facility, Politis said it also has the room and ability to move further into the retail sector with value-added products and packaging. “That’s one reason why we had the grand opening,” said Politis. “To let our customers see all we offer and the products we carry. We are known as a produce house with specialty cheeses, olive oils and dry items. But once our customers come and tour the facility, they see all the products we carry.”

The opening of the facility in January is all the more impressive as it came in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, which devastated the foodservice sector. “In March and April (of 2020), all the restaurants, hotels and country clubs closed. Our business fell right off the cliff,” Politis said. “We slowly started to work our way back last summer. We are lucky to be in Florida which opened up sooner than anyone else. It took a long time but right now we are ahead of where we were in 2019.”

The future looks bright, according to the Mr. Greens chief executive, because there are still many in the foodservice industry that haven’t reopened. Conventions and big events aren’t back yet, and many hotels and restaurants are not yet operating on all cylinders. While it was terrible that some smaller restaurants had to close and are not going to reopen, Politis said it has created opportunities for other entrepreneurs. He noted that many restaurant groups with deeper pockets saw this as an opportunity to get into the Miami market with their own restaurant concepts. Consequently, Mr. Greens has added new customers.

The Miami operation services the Miami metropolitan area, goes south into the Florida Keys, east to Naples on the Gulf Coast and north into Vero Beach. Mr. Greens also has an operation in Plant City that services Orlando and Central Florida, and a smaller location in Jacksonville for the northern part of the state. “We can service 90 percent of the state,” Politis said. “The only place we don’t go is the Panhandle and Tallahassee.”

Mr. Greens has also recently opened up a facility in Texas to start making inroads in that market.

Politis revealed the building of the new facility in Miami was a leap of faith. The company had already drawn up the plans and started construction in a limited way when COVID-19 hit. “We could have taken a financial hit and walked away,” he said. “But we took a long-term view and moved forward. We were bursting at the seams in our old building, and we knew we needed a new facility to continue to grow.”

Politis said the company also took a long-term view of its relationships with its vendors, grower partners and employees. “We paid all of our vendors on time and did not ask to extend terms,” he stated. “And we had no mass layoffs. We made a few changes because of performance issues but we kept our staff intact. We were also able to hire a few good people that were laid off by competitors.”

Politis said the strategy was successful as other companies are struggling with labor shortages, but Mr. Greens is not. “We have trucks, we have drivers and we have personnel in our warehouses,” he said, adding that the labor shortages others are experiencing has helped Mr. Greens grow its business. He said many foodservice operations are finding it difficult to fill all their slots and they are jobbing out the prep work to Mr. Greens by buying more of its value-added packs. “Restaurants just don’t have the staff to dice onions,” he said.

In reflecting on the past decade, Politis said Mr. Greens has come a long way. “When my cousin Peter (Politis) bought Mr. Greens in August 2011, it was a tiny company with six employees, two trucks and a handful of clients working out of a rented 3,000 square foot facility.” Today among its five operations, it has more than 300 employees and operates at least 100 trucks, according to Politis. “Our growth has been very good,” he said in an understated way.

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