



Michael Speech, Jr., president of Speech Family Candy Shoppe, puts together one of the firm's fruit and chocolate arrangements, which he says account for 15 percent to 20 percent of the store's annual revenue from retail.

PHOTO CREDIT: SPEECH FAMILY CANDY SHOPPE

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SPECTRUM NEWS

Speech Family Candy Shoppe introduces new line of fruit and chocolate arrangements

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SYRACUSE — The Speech Family Candy Shoppe — a 98-year-old candy company passed down through four generations — will launch a new line of fruit confections called Fruit Workz in July, designing new arrangements and flavors of fruit mixed with chocolate.

The candy company used to create orders for Fruitbouquets.com, which is owned by 1-800-Flowers.com. However, the company asked its fulfillers — shops that create the arrangements ordered from the larger corporation — to stop using the artwork and trademarked names it had previously supplied. Fruitbouquets.com utilizes more than 200 shops, such as Speech Family Candy Shoppe.

Michael Speech, Jr., president of the family-owned candy store, says that the national company said by using the artwork and product names on the local shop websites, marketing analytics were reporting inaccurately. When smaller companies, such as Speech Family Candy Shoppe used the same artwork and names as Fruitbouquets.com, it was more difficult for the larger company to see what its digital marketing impact was, Speech says.

Speech Family Candy Shoppe still fulfills orders for Fruitbouquets.com, but can't use the same artwork or names of the bouquets it creates. However, Speech says the fruit arrangements are a significant and growing revenue source for his business.

"Not only working with FruitBouquets, but also with people ordering through us

directly, we've seen quite a nice increase in our revenue." Speech says. "About 15-20 percent of our revenue every year for retail was from fruit."

After the announcement that it could no longer use material from FruitBouquets.com, Speech says he decided to release its own brand of fruit and chocolate products called Fruit Workz. It is a rebranding concept, in which the store will rename all fruit arrange-



ments, and introduce some new confections.

Fruit Workz includes fruit mixed with candy and chocolate — such as caramel-dipped apples, chocolate-covered strawberries, and arrangements of these candies and fruits — which the company has been producing for years. Speech says that "adult" fruit arrangements are being created as well. New items "in the works" include white chocolate mixed with limoncello blueberries and grapes soaked in gin and dipped in chocolate.

"I think the fruit is becoming more and more interesting to people. Some people are a little more health conscious, so to have fruit with a little bit of chocolate is okay," Speech says. "We've seen how the health-conscious person is a little more into doing a fruit bouquet for a family or as a gift."

Fruit Workz is the first new line of products that Speech Family Candy Shoppe has released since its chocolate brickles, a twist on chocolate bark, in 2009. Then, there were about 20 different varieties. Now, the business has more than 70 types of chocolate brickle sold on the Speech Family Candy Shoppe website.

The company has generated growth in the past several years, but says its annual revenue is under \$500,000. With the release of Fruit Workz, Speech says he hopes to maintain the growth that the company has had.

During the summer months, Speech says the firm employs about five people full time because there aren't many "candy holidays" then. But starting in October, the business will hire up to 15 people total — a mix of part- and full-time.

The Speech Family Candy Shoppe was founded in 1920 by Speech's great grandfather by the same name, Michael, and has been at its current location — 2400 Lodi St. in Syracuse — since 1994.

The store space is about 1,000 square feet and the workshop space encompasses about 2,000 square feet for a total of 3,000 square feet, the company president says. Speech also says that the candy store might expand to another location for production purposes eventually, but he says there's no timeline on that project, and most likely won't be for another five to 10 years. ■