

The man behind the chocolate: Norman Love

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The name Norman Love is synonymous with chocolate here in Southwest Florida. But, that wasn't always the case.

Norman Love began his culinary career at the age of 15 as an ice cream maker at Swensen's Ice Cream of Florida in Fort Lauderdale.

"It was the perfect high school job because they didn't care when you came in or when you left -- as long as there was enough ice cream in the store," said Love.

At a young age, Love was attracted to art -- more specifically the art of food.

"The way I found the culinary arts was just a way to express art through food," said Love.

According to Love, pastry was more progressive than the savory kitchen in the early to mid 1970s.

"Pastry was a way for me to express art more creatively than the cuisine of this country at the time," said Love.

By the time Love graduated high school, he had set his sights on becoming a pastry chef. But there was one problem. At the time, there were only two culinary schools in the country. However, neither offered exclusive pastry programs -- and only focused six weeks on pastries.

"I was quite confident that pastry was what I wanted," said Love. "At that point, I just sought out the best pastry chefs that I could and began learning on the job."

In 1983, Love had the opportunity of a lifetime. He traveled to the south of France to work with a friend who owned a pastry shop in an area called [Lussan](#)-- where he worked for almost two years.

"Any time you have an opportunity to work with another culinarian, it's an opportunity to learn," said Love. "I'm so much about continuous improvement. I have this burning hunger - even after 40 years - to be better than yesterday."

When Love returned to the states, he went back to Florida's east coast -- where he continued to work at hotels in the Miami Beach area.

In 1987, Love married his wife, Mary, and moved to California.

"At that time, Los Angeles [and] San Francisco was some of the most progressive culinary movements in the country, and I had the opportunity to work at the Beverly Hills Hotel," said Love.

He spent three years working at the Beverly Hills Hotel as the executive pastry chef. Love described the hotel as one with lots of history, tradition and heritage.

In 1990, Love joined the Ritz Carlton hotel group and moved his family to St. Louis, Missouri. While working for the Ritz Carlton, Love moved up the corporate ladder, and was appointed corporate executive pastry chef. He was tasked with overseeing the company's pastry operations worldwide.

The job took Love many places -- including Dubai, Barcelona and Egypt. The Ritz Carlton eventually brought him to Southwest Florida -- as the hotel in Naples was one of the flagship locations for the company.

"My family moved to Fort Lauderdale when I was in the 10th grade. So Florida was a bit home," said Love.

But, traveling 42 weeks out of the year pulled him away from his family. It became tiring.

"I was never home, and it was time to rejoin my family," said Love. "I was tired, quite honestly. I was tired of living out of a suitcase."

In 2001, Love became involved in creating a culinary show for TV FoodNetwork -- a project that caused him to leave the Ritz Carlton. Later that year, Love and his wife took a risk and opened up Norman Love Confections in Fort Myers.

"I think, personally, it's the best thing that I've ever done," said Love. "Pastries, I say, is my life and chocolate is my passion."

Norman Love Confections has grown from two to over 70 employees. Love recently opened his third chocolate salon at Miramar Outlets -- where they offer not just chocolates, but pastries, gelato and coffee as well.

"It's humbling to know that our local customers have embraced what we do everyday," said Love.

Now, that teenager who scooped ice cream 40 years ago has become a successful global entrepreneur.

"A lot of people believe that success is something in the future," said Love. "But, you know, every day is about being successful. If you got to work every day to be successful, what you find in the future is called reward."

To learn more about Norman Love Confections, [click here](#).

