

# Candymaker has winning recipe for sweet success

Norman Love puts everything into its gourmet chocolate

Laura Ruane  
USA TODAY

Norman Love Confections goes global this year, cruising on vintage TV's *Love Boat* line.

The partnership with Princess Cruises is one of the sweetest accomplishments for Norman Love, company founder and president.

The Fort Myers, Fla.-based entrepreneur is known in culinary circles for transforming a box of chocolate candies — typically little brown squares and rectangles — into “a box of little jewels,” says Keegan Gerhard, chef, restaurateur and longtime Food Network host.

That creativity, combined with consummate perfectionism and a passion for his community, have earned Love acclaim in Southwest Florida. Other achievements this year include:

- ▶ A fourth retail shop in the Fort Myers-Naples, Fla., area; and

- ▶ Recognition as a Southwest Florida Junior Achievement Business Hall of Famer.

To be sure, the cruise line connection is a big deal for Love, whose headquarters is a flyball away from JetBlue Park, spring training home for the Boston Red Sox.

Chocolate Journeys is a joint venture featuring custom-crafted desserts prepared by Love-trained chefs, chocolate cocktails, dessert-making demonstrations, chocolate and wine tastings and Love chocolates sold in ship stores.

It launches on Regal Princess this month and will be available throughout the 18-ship fleet.

Norman Love Confections is one of 10 finalists in USA TODAY's Entrepreneur of the Year contest. Profiles of the other contenders will run in the coming weeks, and a winner will be selected in December.

The candy company was founded in October 2001 by Love and his wife, Mary. It creates and distributes ultra-premium, hand-crafted chocolates from its Southwest Florida headquarters.

The chocolates, as well as fine pastries, desserts and gelato, are produced fresh daily for sale at three chocolate salons and a gelato shop. Chocolates are sold wholesale and through the company website, [www.NormanLove-Confections.com](http://www.NormanLove-Confections.com), and can be shipped throughout the continental USA.

Over 13 years, Love grew his artisanal candy and pastry business from two employees working in 600 square feet to nearly 70 employees; a 6,000-square-foot chocolate factory; a 5,000-square-foot pastry, bakery and gelato production center; a 10,000-square-foot warehouse/fulfillment area; and four retail stores, plus more than 200 restaurant and hotel accounts.



KINFAY MOROTI, THE NEWS-PRESS

Chocolate tarts are among Norman Love's most popular confectionery creations.

THE 2014  
**USA TODAY**  
**ENTREPRENEUR**  
**OF THE YEAR**  
FINALIST

Love's advice to entrepreneurs:

- ▶ Make product integrity the first priority.
- ▶ Create customer loyalty by exceeding expectations.
- ▶ Empower your team to work more creatively today than yesterday.
- ▶ Always give back and support your community.

“Our biggest struggle in the last several months is transitioning from a mom-and-pop business to a global player,” Love says, alluding to the venture with Princess Cruises. This has required devel-



LINDSAY E. TERRY, THE NEWS-PRESS

Chocolates made by Norman Love are now available on Princess Cruises, as well as through four retail outlets.

**“Our growth is dictated by our ability to produce more without compromising quality or customer service.”**

Chocolatier Norman Love

oping methods to better control inventory, centralize warehousing and refine the point-of-sale system.

Love says, “Our growth is dictated by our ability to produce more without compromising quality or customer service.”

It's not an easy task, given Southwest Florida's still-recovering economy and rising cocoa prices.

That hasn't deterred the Loves from supporting more than 250 charity efforts yearly, including the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Make a Wish America.

Love has gone global in his charitable giving: A year ago, he created Love Origins, a line of chocolates using cocoa with distinctive flavors and sourced from farmers with sound humanitarian and environmental business practices.

He donates a portion of Love Origins proceeds to the Rice Stove Project that brings environmentally friendly and inexpensive cooking stoves to residents of Peru's cacao bean-rich Marañón Canyon.

Back home, Love coaxed celebrity chef friends Gerhard, former host of the *Food Network Challenge*; Florian Bellanger of *Food Network's Cupcake Wars*; and Johnny Iuzzini of *Bravo's Top Chef: Just Desserts* into cooking with him in Fort Myers last year.

Gerhard first met Love at a pastry competition in New York City and later worked as assistant pastry chef under Love at the Ritz-Carlton in Naples. He considers Love both mentor and friend and wrote the foreword for Love's soon-to-be-released, self-published book *Chocolate Artistry*.

Gerhard calls Love a pastry master, astute businessman, tremendous teacher and compassionate community giver, then adds: “What I most love about Norman is the humility with which he strives for excellence every day.”

“He never forgets that we're in a service industry — it's all about the guest.”

Ruane reports for *The News-Press* in Fort Myers, Fla.



SARAH COWARD, THE (FORT MYERS, FLA.) NEWS-PRESS

Norman Love (yes, it's his real name) makes his version of a Snickers candy bar for Halloween.