

Chowda!

Soup's on at Bay State Chowda Company in Lowell

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Frigid winter weather and hot chowders, soups, stews and bisques are always a perfect match.

What is more satisfying after battling below freezing temperatures and wicked wind-chill factors than a steaming bowl of New England clam chowder? What warms the innards better after a day of brisk skiing on a Vermont or New Hampshire mountaintop than a delicious bowl of seafood chowder in a fine resort restaurant?

Chances are, if you have savored a flavorful bowl of chowder, soup, or bisque at a New England ski resort or local restaurant, you may have sampled one of Bay State Chowda Company's growing product lines.

Richard Lamattina, president and founder of Bay State Chowda Co., Inc. at 101 Phoenix Ave., Lowell, knew from the moment he opened The Loft restaurant in North Andover in 1978 that his New England clam chowder recipe was unique.

"People told us it was outstanding and used to come into The Loft and buy it by the quart," Lamattina says proudly. "It made us ask what else we could do with the product we were making at the restaurant, to get it to more people."

More enthusiastic praise greeted Lamattina's recipe in 1983, when Bay State Chowda Company won first place at the first annual Boston Chowderfest, held on Boston Common. After a 10-year respite from the Boston Chowderfest scene, Lamattina reentered the competition in July 1993 and once again was voted number one.

"The contest is judged by the general public and there are around 10,000 people or more who attend the festival each year," says Lamattina. "When you have that many people telling you that your product is good, it is just more foundation for saying, 'where can I go with this product?'"

The answer for Lamattina was Faneuil Hall Market Place, where he opened a food stand, using the name Kitchens of the Bay State in 1988. All menu items represented foods cooked in the Bay State area. Chowders, chilis, and soups were prepared on the premises. Business boomed.

"We found out that the space was just too small to make it, sell it, and serve it," says Lamattina. "We opened up a satellite location to manufacture the product in Malden, Mass.," also in 1988.

While in Malden, Lamattina and staff learned to prepare product in larger quantities, pack it fresh in cryo-vac bags, and ship it to Bay State



Mike Turchinets of Bay State Chowda Company in Lowell, with its packaged foods.

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Chowda's two locations: North Andover and Faneuil Hall. Through necessity, the company's production methods became more sophisticated.

"The idea came to us that if we could do this successfully for ourselves, how many other restaurants out there did not want to go through the pains of making their own clam chowder, soups or chili?" Lamattina says.

Bay State Chowda's reputation spread quickly. The company expanded and in 1991 moved to a former fish processing facility in Lawrence, where Joseph Jolly, vice president of opera-

tions, and William Kelleher, vice president of sales and marketing, were added to the staff. Kraft Foods, S.S. Pierce, and Hallsmith-Sysco began distributing Bay State Chowda's food products to an increasing variety of restaurants.

Product volume surged. A new cafe opened in 1991 at the recently renovated Prudential Center in Boston. In spring 1992, a company store was established in North Andover. Through Bay State Chowda's rapid growth spurt, the search began for a larger, USDA approved facility.

In fall 1992, Lamattina established his manufacturing headquarters in Lowell, and in March 1993, introduced his first retail item for supermarkets.

"It is a 16-ounce, frozen, microwavable or boil in the bag, ready to heat and eat product," Lamattina says. "We offer it in three varieties: seafood chowder, lobster bisque and New England Clam chowder. It can be found locally in the frozen seafood section of Demoulas, and it is available in supermarkets all over western Massachusetts. Con-

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necticut, upstate New York, Colorado and Kansas," he adds with a grin.

Lamattina's chowder recipe is a well-guarded secret. However, he says the key to making superb clam chowder is selecting superior ingredients: the finest cream, high quality potatoes, and of course, fresh, sweet, clams.

"Most people don't want to attempt making New England clam chowder," chuckles Lamattina. "They leave it up to the cooks and restaurateurs like us."

For the more adventurous home chefs, the chowder recipe below (although it is not the award winning Bay State Chowda recipe and does not require cream), will warm chilly souls on these final frosty evenings of winter.

Traditional New England Clam Chowder

1½ qts. chopped clams

"When you have that many people telling you that your product is good, it is just more foundation for saying, 'where can I go with this product?'"

Richard Lamattina of
Bay State Chowda Company

½ lb. butter or margarine
3 medium onions, chopped
3 large potatoes, diced
2 tablespoons flour
1 quart milk
1 pint evaporated milk
2 cups clam juice
salt, fresh ground pepper to taste
celery salt to taste
white pepper to taste
Melt butter in chowder pot, add chopped onions and saute till translucent on low



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Bay State Chowda Company employee mixes up a batch of its prize-winning product.

heat. Add potatoes, cover with water (enough to cover potatoes). Simmer until potatoes are done. Add clams and two cups of clam juice. Dissolve flour in a little milk and add to

pot, stirring it in well. Cook a little longer and there is your basic Cape Cod clam chowder. When ready to serve, add milk and evaporated milk and heat through, but do not boil. Add

salt, celery salt, fresh ground black pepper and a little white pepper to taste.

Serve in large bowls. Garnish with oyster crackers and chopped bacon bits (optional).