



THE WAFFLE SHUFFLE

Dutch cookie manufacturer sees the sweeter side of life thanks to ultramodern integration line

BY ALANNA FAIREY, ASSISTANT EDITOR
PHOTOS BY NAOMI HILTZ

Family-owned **Schep's Bakeries Ltd.** has come a long way since its humble beginnings as a small business for small specialty stores over 35 years ago.

Founded by Dutch-born Arie Schep, Schep's Bakery quickly blossomed into the only stroopwafel manufacturer in North America, distributing the Double Dutch waffle cookie assortments into larger retail stores in Canada and the U.S. market.

For the past eight years, the Norwich, Ont.-based Schep's Bakery facility stands at an impressive 50,000-square-foot, where they are conveniently at the centre of a predominantly Dutch community.

"We've grown from a smaller shop to a bigger shop," says Schep's Bakery president Jacco Schep, who has taken up the mantle from his father and has continued to oversee production of only the best waffle cookies, credited to a tightly guarded family recipe.

"Making waffle cookies is what we do—it's our main focus," extols Schep.

A true Dutch delicacy, a stroopwafel is a wafer made from two thin layers of baked dough with a golden caramel syrup filling in the middle. While it was first made popular in the Netherlands, nowadays stroopwafels are enjoyed worldwide.

While most stroopwafels are traditionally filled with caramel, Schep's Bakery has created gluten-free and organic varieties, and a plethora of flavours requested by their customers, which include fan favourite, Cookies & Crème.

"If demand is there, we will create it," Schep told *Canadian Packaging* during a recent visit to the lively 55-employee facility working on two-shifts, six-days-a-week schedule throughout most of the year, with steady demand upticks throughout the year.

"Everything changes daily—there's trends and there is necessary changes.

"As a business, you try to go along with it as much as you can based on how big the market is for that particular trend."

To show their commitment to producing high quality stroopwafels, the Schep's Bakery plant has earned the internationally recognized *GFSI* (*Global Food Safety Initiative*) and *BRC* (*British Retail Consortium*) certifications, while the stroopwafels are Kosher, gluten-free, and only use Non-GMO and sustainably sourced ingredients.

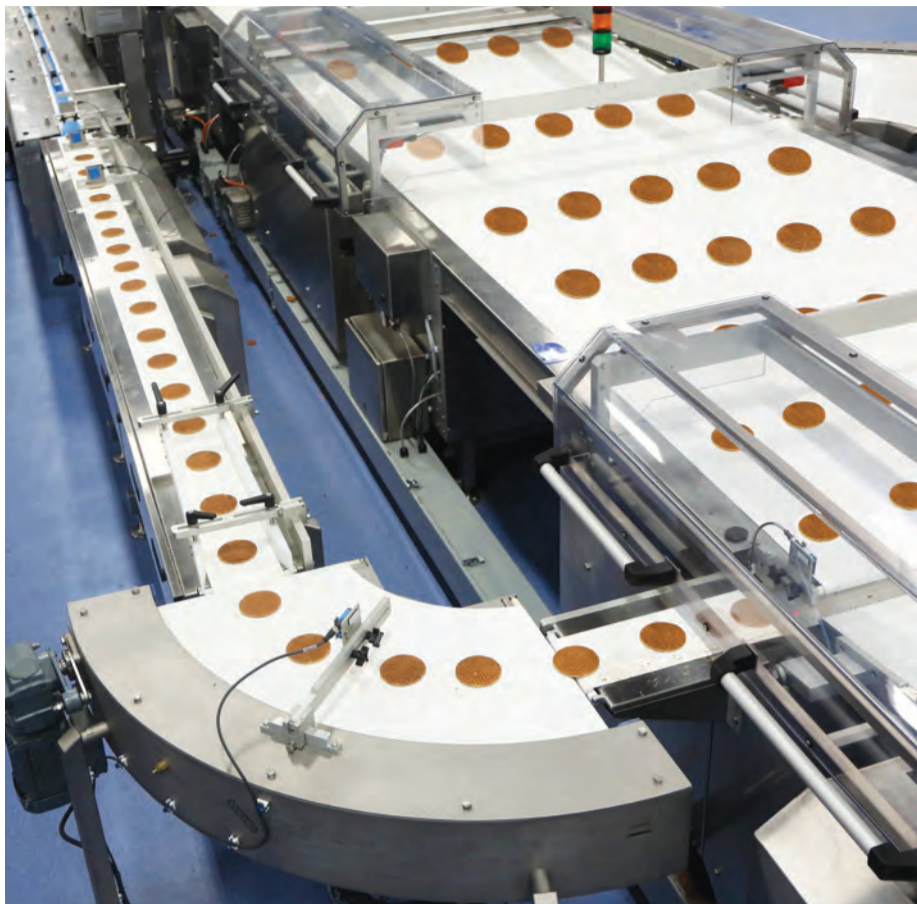
According to Jonathan Schep, the younger of the two Schep brothers, consumers have provided them with glowing reviews of their stroopwafels.

"Customers just love the product," says Jonathan. "We look at the quality more than at the quantity

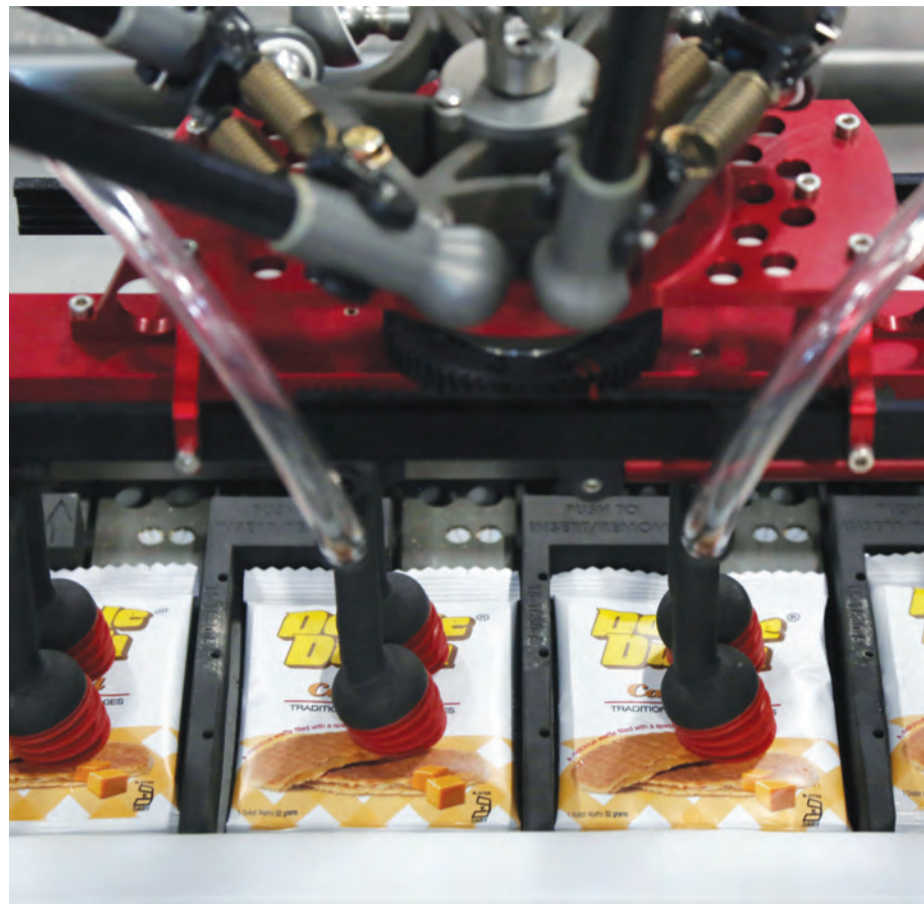


LEFT TO RIGHT: Schep's Bakeries Ltd. president Jacco Schep shows off the different varieties of stroopwafel products (pictured inset) with the help of Propack technical sale representative Joseph Bradley and younger brother and plant manager Jonathan Schep at the 50,000-square-foot Norwich, Ont.-based facility.





A bird's eye view of the Propack Row Distribution System (RDS), which had been installed by Propack to help speed up production at the 55-employee facility.



A close-up of the Propack Flexible Robotic Top Loader loading the wrapped stroopwafel products into cartons prior to distribution.

of what we do.”

“It’s always about how it tastes, and how it looks.”

Adds Jonathan: “We have our own in-house R&D (research-and-development) lab to develop new flavours and waffle types.”

Although Schep’s Bakery will continue to make top-notch stroopwafels, the Schep brothers are mindful that they are doing business in an increasingly competitive market.

“The industry is competitive,” Schep reiterates.

“Even though we are the only stroopwafel manufacturer in North America, there is definitely competition out of other parts of the world, which keeps the business interesting.”

To stay afloat in an increasingly competitive and demanding market, the Schep

brother’s sought the help of **Propack Processing & Packaging Systems Inc.**, a leading supplier of custom robotic packaging solutions.

Specializing in high-speed pick-and-place structures for applications such as cakes, cookies, candy, granola and snack bars, Propack has been a faithful partner of Schep’s Bakery for over a year and a half.

“A lot of machines were considered during the process of making the decision on which company to use and why, and I think that in the end, Schep’s Bakery chose Propack,” says Joseph Bradley, a technical sales representative for Propack.

“We were able to work together as a team, and as a team we developed a system that we believe is beyond what’s available in the market as a standard offering.”

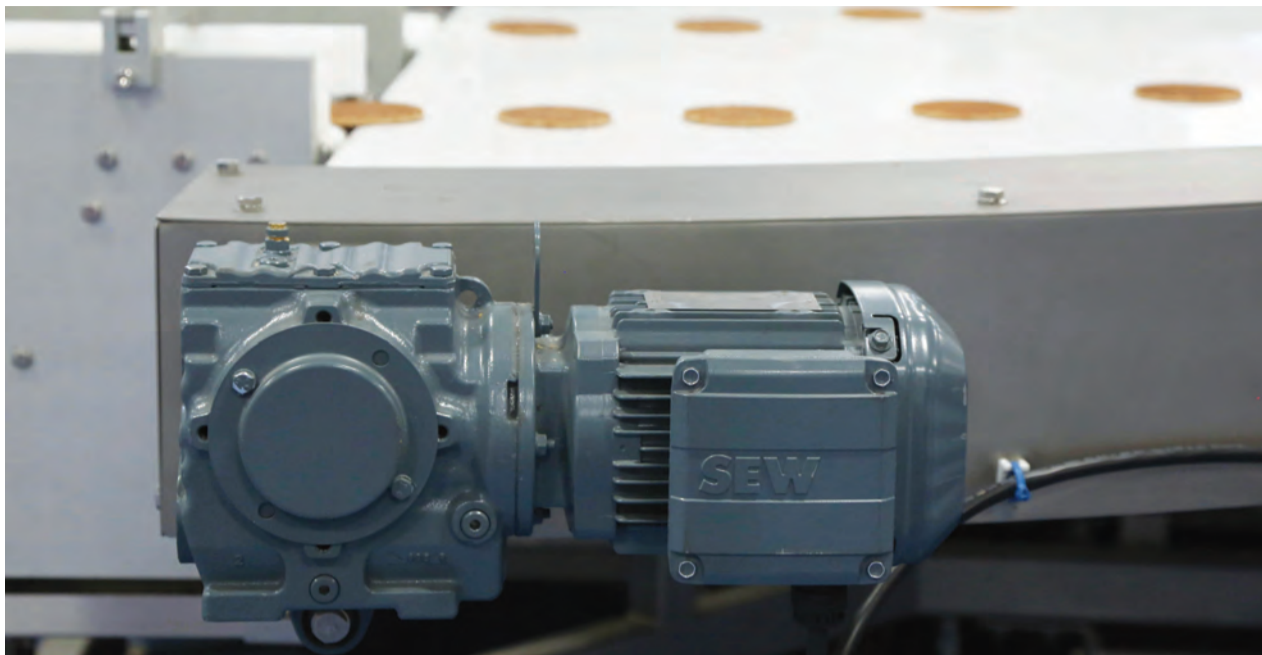
The **Propack Row Distribution System (RDS)**, which has been installed at



The waffle cookies are run through a METTLER TOLEDO metal detection system to check for any possible contaminants that may have inadvertently made their way into the product before being distributed for retail sale.



The METTLER TOLEDO Hi-Speed checkweigher offers precision weighing to avoid product waste, while also allowing for increased product performance.



The RDS system relies on a SEW-Eurodrive motor for optimal power distribution to move the stroopwafels up the production line.



The stroopwafel cookies are guaranteed to be fresh thanks to the top grade resealable stand-up style pouches that Schep's Bakery uses.



The Dutch cookies making their way to the spiral conveyor system, which transports the stroopwafels at a continuous flow.



The mini stroopwafel products are sealed thanks to the Swifty Bagger 3600 (See Sidebar).



Schep's Bakery uses a Hitachi small-character inkjet printer supplied by Harlund Industries to apply barcodes and other key product data onto the finished stroopwafel product.

the plant for about six months, uses AC motors and servo technology to receive rows of prepared stroopwafels from upstream processing equipment and coordinates product delivery on-time, on-demand to low, medium, or high-speed wrapping machines.

A flexible machine, the younger Schep brother has no qualms about singing its praises.

"The RDS distribution system that we have is one of the most advanced in the world," Jonathan shares. "There really is nothing else out there like it with all of its capabilities."

Prior to being distributed and sold throughout North America, the waffle is baked as per the family recipe's instructions, the waffles are filled with the syrup and it is then cooled.

Once they have cooled, the waffle cookies are promptly distributed in rows on the RDS' main belt, where the central panel controls system determines which line the cookie will go.

"The system has the ability to deliver those rows to multiple packaging streams simultaneously or independently," Bradley explains.

"This includes distributing stroopwafels to high speed wrappers and then sending them further downstream to robotic carton loading.

"Or, the RDS can make a decision to deliver products to the scale and bagging system instead of to the wrappers.

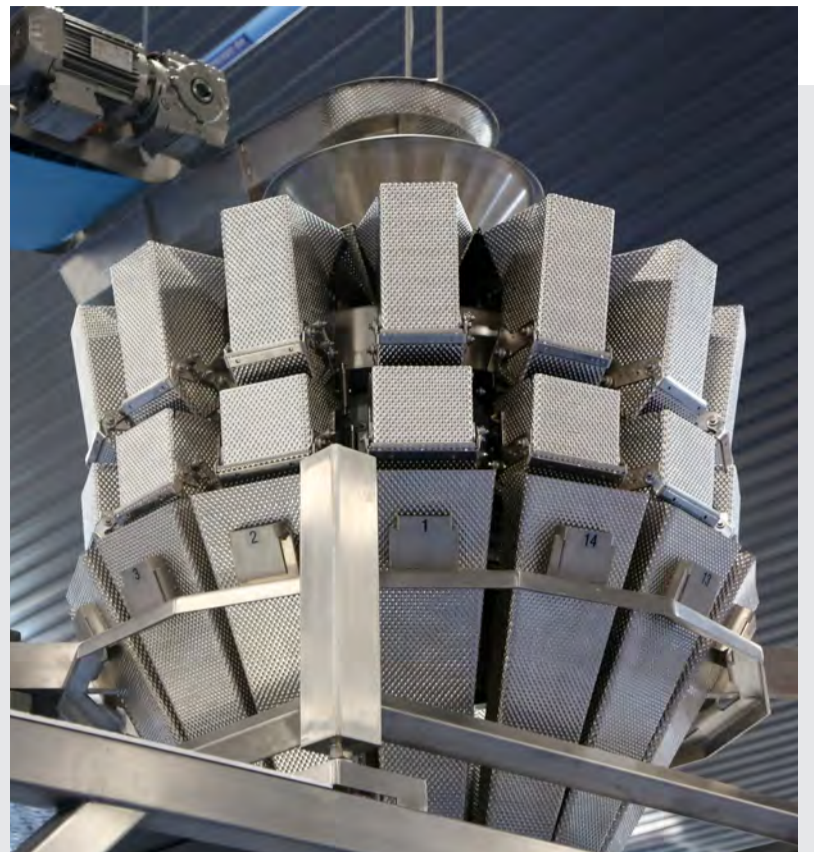
"We can also wrap the product and then send it to the baggers instead of going to the cartons."

Having met in the initial stages of Schep's Bakery looking for a partner, the Schep brothers were very clear about what they wanted the overall line to look as an integrated packaging line as one system from Propack.

Suffice to say, Propack provided everything and more in the eyes of Schep's Bakery.

"Everything had to be integrated along with all of the programming and Propack took care of everything from start to finish," Jonathan says.

"From purchasing the machines, to getting them all here, to installing it and setting it up, and commissioning it, everything has been good—what more can we say?"



IN THE BAG

Supplied from **The Paxiom Group**, Schep's Bakery uses a state-of-the-art **Swiftly Bagger 3600** for their stand-up pouches as well as a **PrimoCombi** multihead weigher, which were seamlessly integrated into Propack's **Row Distribution System (RDS)**.

The PrimoCombi multihead weigher's two main goals are to achieve high accuracy requirements and high production rates.

When the center of the PrimoCombi multihead weigher is filled in bulk with stroopwafels, the feeder pans promptly transport the finished product to the weigh bucket where it is then weighed and measured before it is sent to the Swiftly Bagger 3600.

Specifically engineered for dispensing snack foods and baked products, the PrimoCombi multihead weigher has been praised for its accuracy and is guaranteed to deliver stroopwafels to the bags within a set range.

Engineered for medium to high production rates, the Swiftly Bagger 3600 offers speeds of up to 35 pre-made bags per minute, which greatly excels production for Schep's Bakery.

The Swiftly Bagger 3600 also includes a comprehensible bag magazine for pouch loading, automatic zipper opening device,

and bag shaker at the fill station for product levelling and an integrated exit conveyor.

This system is able to accept pre-made pouches of multiple sizes, of length and width, and several different styles of bags.

The Swiftly Bagger 3600 will also accept bags with or without a zipper feature, depending on the request of the customer.

According to Jonathan, the Swiftly Bagger 3600 has been an asset to Schep's Bakery, thanks to its flexible and user-friendly interfaces.

"We are able to do bags with naked product," Jonathan explains. "But we also have the ability to do bags filled with individually wrapped waffles."

Noting that the Swiftly Bagger 3600 helped Schep's Bakery to expand its overall product line, Jonathan feels that the machine has not only been a benefit for Schep's Bakery, but also for their customers.

"It's a great machine that has all of the capabilities we need," Jonathan adds.

"People are looking for a quick treat, so why not deliver it to them in a beautiful bag with a re-closable seal that retains the freshness as if it was just baked in your own kitchen?"



Schep's Bakery has not only reaped the benefits of Propack's flexible integrated line, but also from their professional aftercare services and support.

In the event of a malfunctioning machine, skilled technicians from Propack are available to assist Schep's Bakery, no matter the time or situation.

"We're about an hour away, so it gives us quick and easy access to react," Bradley explains.

"We stock a lot of spare parts and we have mechanical, electrical and programming technicians available that have been working together with the team at Schep's to make sure that we're reacting to any requirements in regards to performance."

Reflecting on the work that Propack has provided for them, Schep is so pleased with the overall work

that Propack has provided, that future purchases from Propack seem almost definite.

"What Propack is able to deliver is above and beyond what we were even thinking, but also above and beyond what is available out there," Schep explains.

"They've been there for us every step of the way, any time of the day."

"Without them, our newest facility would not be where it is not."

Looking ahead, the older Schep brother is certain that the future of stroopwafels will continue to be bright and that Schep's Bakery will continue leading the way by developing new products for both the health and snack markets.

"We see a big future and we see a lot of growth in

it," Schep says with confidence.

"Right now, our hope is to be the leader in the market and to stay the leader.

Concludes Schep: "That's why it's really important to know what the consumer wants and to deliver what they want." 🍁

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Propack Processing & Packaging Systems Inc.

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AFA Systems