

When life hands him lemons ...

... this Clementon candymaker crafts traditional sweets

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In [summer](#), when it's time to make the lemon sticks, Dave Giambri leaves the air-conditioned comfort of the chocolate room upstairs at his family's candy business in Clementon. Downstairs, a copper kettle of boiling sugar syrup awaits his attention, all 40 pounds and 330 degrees of it.

There are easier ways to make a living in [sweets](#).

In business since 1942, Giambri's Quality Sweets has a bustling wholesale operation, supplying gourmet Belgian chocolate-dipped pretzels and caramel-filled waffles, the kind of [decadent](#) indulgences snapped up by New York's high-end department stores.

But, no, Giambri insists on making the lemon sticks, the old-fashioned hard candy his great-uncle used to make in Philadelphia on this same equipment.

Poked into a halved lemon, the lemon sticks can be used to suck the tart juice right through. It takes a while, so be patient. The longer you do it, says Giambri, the more the inside disappears and the more juice you'll get.

It's tradition. People still ask for it.

So for the next hour, Giambri manipulates the sugar by hand. He moves constantly. He can tell just by how it looks and feels when it's ready for each step. He's been doing this since he was 10 years old.

With the help of his 19-year-old son, David, and employee Dave Giffin, Giambri cools the syrup on a greased metal cooling table. The men use knives and metal spatulas to flip the edges over, transforming the syrup into a heavy mass of molten candy.

He adds the yellow coloring and the lemon flavoring at this point, kneading the candy by hand like it's [bread](#) dough. Any earlier and the high temperatures would destroy the citrus flavor.

When the candy is at the right consistency and temperature, half of it is put onto the pulling machine, where air is incorporated into the mass. The machine turns it over and over until the candy turns milky white. This will be the porous center of the lemon stick.

Giambri pulls the yellow half into a rectangle, and wraps it over the white center, turning it into a giant block. He adds white stripes to the outside, and places the whole thing on another ancient contraption that turns the candy beneath jets of tiny blue flames.

Using his hands, Giambri rolls thin ropes of yellow twists and passes them down to a marble slab where they will cool for cutting and packing by the dozen. Each batch yields about 1,500 lemon sticks.

The process has hardly changed since Giambri first learned it from his own father, but some innovations have made the candy even more tempting to modern buyers. He also makes an all-natural version without corn syrup or artificial color. And recently, he had solar panels installed on top of the building, so he can tell people it's made with [clean](#) energy.

Still, he makes fewer batches than he did when he was younger. He doesn't have to make them; he wants to, despite the brutal heat of summer.

Lemon sticks bring back [childhood](#) memories for many of his customers.

"It's hard to say no," says Giambri, who will switch to making candy canes at the end of September.

"It's great to keep that tradition going."

MORE INFORMATION

[Lemon](#) sticks are sold online and at Giambri's Quality Sweets, 26 Brand Ave., Clementon. Call (856) 783-1099 or visit www.giambriscandy.com

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