

# Concord Monitor Online

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By Lisa Arsenault

**Gordon Weinberger**, 41, started his own apple pie company in the early 1990s after winning two pie contests with his great-grandmother's recipe at Londonderry Old Home Day. His company, Gordon's Pies, nearly went bankrupt, but Weinberger was able to turn it around and ended up selling the multi-million dollar business to Mrs. Smith's Bakeries in 2001. Now, Weinberger is touting his success in a book called *Infinite Persistence*, his formula for how to succeed in life.

How did this business go from bust to boom?

We had a wacky, Willy Wonka-like factory in Londonderry. It was crazy. Nine thousand square feet of space and everything was done by hand. We had 50 or so moms and local folks packing those pies. All the equipment was from old pizza stores. The dough was rolled out by hand, put in tins, filled and put into a big oven. It was one of these stories that started as sort of a joke - winning two pie-baking contests and going from the pie contest to saying, well, I'll make some out of my kitchen, maybe it would be fun to deliver them to local farm stands.

From that, it went to having the little local baker make 100 at a time and got into a couple of grocery stores. I would deliver the pies out of the back of my 4Runner. It went from there to me coming home in March of 1994 and saying I would really like to do this full time. I wrote a business plan and got investors.

We opened the doors in 1994, making pies by hand until 1997. Then we realized, "We gotta do something." Instead of going bankrupt, let's shut down the factory. Let's have someone else make the pies - in Montreal. That's when I got on the bus, started shaking people's hands. In 2000, we got the Wal-Mart account and that changed everything. We went from \$400,000 to \$3 million in sales really quickly.

The story is born out of necessity. It was born of the necessity back in 1997. Being a couple of days away from bankruptcy, what we did was we got on the pie bus and ran it like it was a political campaign. We called it a pie-litical campaign. I got dressed up in that crazy costume

with the crazy hat and shorts and day after day after day went out and shook people's hands and said, "Hey, we're in a lot of trouble. Would you please buy the pies?" And if I was talking to a grocery store, I'd say, "Hey, you're the bakery manager or store manager of Shaw's Supermarket. Would you be kind enough to please put out some more of my pies?" It became legend. Nobody has ever marketed that way.

What was it like on the road, building your business?

There were a lot of crazy stories in building it. You could almost go anywhere in the book and see the crazy, wacked-out stories. . .We went into Boston with a 10- or 11-foot-high apple on wheels to do a promotion to give out pies in Dorchester, of all places. We decided we wanted to do something in the inner city, wanted to give back. We ended up getting caught in traffic. We called the mayor's office for help, saying we were late for this event and we've got tons of pies in a 10-11-foot-high apple on wheels. It was hysterical. We were on the lower deck going into Boston, saying, "We're going to be late, we don't know how long it's going to take us to get to Dorchester." Ten minutes later, four state troopers on motorcycles came and gave us a police escort through Boston.

Now that you've sold the pie business, can you tell us the secret recipe?

It was really good apples from Londonderry. It was MacIntosh and Cortland, 50-50. One cup of sugar. A couple teaspoons of cinnamon, a little dash of nutmeg, a little lemon and the crust of your choice. Crust is crust - it's just flour and water. This pie was just very basic. . .It's one of the wacky, iconic kind of things. Apple pie is such an American dessert. I thought it would be something really fun to market and really fun to sell and really fun to get out there.

What have you been doing since you sold the business to Mrs. Smith's Bakeries?

Nothing. I haven't worked in three years. I have just enjoyed life. I totally checked out. I spent time with family and friends. We bought a house down in Connecticut where our family is from. We still have our house in Sunapee. We really reconnected with family. Then last year I started writing this book.