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## Local Candy Store Entrepreneur Sweetens Charities Through Annual Giving

By Henry M. Holden

John Tompkins (aka JT) spent 23 years on Wall Street running a credit derivatives floor. In 2008, they wanted him to sign a new

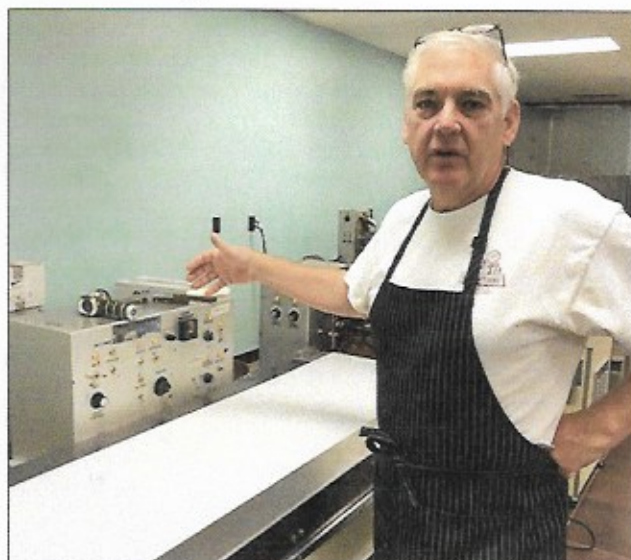
contract, but he realized he was burning out. He saw a two-week window where he could resign without being in a breach of contract so, he took it.

"I was able to

get out while I still had a sliver of my soul intact," he said. "At the time I had no plans or intentions to do anything."

Tompkins had developed a craving for homemade caramels growing up; specifically, Mrs. Cooks' caramels. She was the mother of his childhood best friend, Andy, and for several years his family had been making caramels and pecan clusters at Christmas time, to give to his neighbors and friends.

"In April of 2011, I decided I needed to do something before my wife killed me in my sleep," he said. "I woke up



John Tompkins, standing in front of the conveyor belt and explaining one of three temperature-sensing computers necessary to produce his finest chocolates. (Photo Henry M. Holden)

one morning and while I was meandering to the kitchen it came to me in a flash. I was going to open a confections company. The

whole thought process took no more than .065 seconds.

"After about six months of experimenting with recipes, burning pots,

myself, and setting off smoke alarms, I created the perfect caramel," he said.

"My caramels are the best caramels

cont. on page 4

### Local Candy Store...

continued from front page  
you will ever eat."

Tompkins found opening a new business is challenging.

"The whole science of 'tempering chocolate' was something I had to learn," he said.

Tempering chocolate is necessary for making smooth, glossy, evenly colored coating

for dipped chocolates. Tempering prevents the dull grayish color and waxy texture that happens when the cocoa fat separates out.

"The process involves melting, a block of chocolate, heating to a specific temperature, and then cooling it down slowly," he described.

"Last year at this time I had a lot of big corporate orders and I couldn't get my brand-new chocolate tempering machine to work properly," he said. "The chocolate wasn't coming out right and I was losing my mind. I called the manufacturer in Boston, and he walked me through the process. I was doing everything right. Finally, he came down here and discovered that the three thermostats used in nine different temperature controls in the process were not calibrated correctly at the factory. This was a big learning curve for me."

As systems improved for Tompkins, so did profit.

"As our sales began increasing, my wife Sharon, reminded me that we have had a very lucky blessed life and suggested that we use JT's to 'pay it back,'" he said.

JT committed to donating a significant part of the profits to

nonprofit organizations.

"In 2013, we began working with Summit Speech School in New Providence N.J.; in 2015, we added the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) component to our charitable universe; in 2016 we added St. Jude's Children Research Hospital to our universe.

"These organizations are in some way near and dear to our hearts," he said.

In the last 4-years JT has donated \$50,000 to charity. His eventual goal is to donate \$150,000 to charity on an annual basis.

"JT's is still a relatively small company; however, our intention is to scale the company through online and corporate sales so that at some point we are writing impactful checks to nonprofits," said Tompkins.

For more information, visit JT's shop in Heritage Square, Randolph; www.jtsconfections.com; or call 908-377-9199.