

Thank You Michele Ferrero

Natasha Lardera (February 19, 2015)



"Siamo fieri di te. Grazie Michele." "We are proud of you. Thank you Michele." With these words, Ferrero, Italy's biggest chocolate manufacturer and maker of other delicious confectionery products, pays homage, on its web site, to Michele Ferrero, often described as a real-life Italian Willy Wonka. The octogenarian entrepreneur died at his home in Monte Carlo on Valentine's day

Rumors are that, despite his age and illness, Mr. Ferrero never stopped taking care of production of both new and old confectionery products.

His never ending industriousness made of him one of the world's richest men and a symbol of the excellence of the Made in Italy.

"His fortune, estimated by Forbes last year at \$26.5 billion, made him No. 22 on the magazine's list of billionaires and easily eclipsed the reported fortune of Italian media mogul and serial prime minister [Silvio Berlusconi](#) [2]." (The Washington Post)

An important player in Italian economic history, Michele Ferrero succeeded in transforming the small laboratory of his father Pietro into a multinational empire, based in the Piedmontese town of Alba, that includes 20 factories and more than 30 thousand collaborators in 53 countries.



It all started in 1949, when, Pietro Ferrero died and Michele had to take over the family business, a lab that produced good sweets at a reasonable price, a sum affordable to everybody from the laborer to the farmer, as poverty was among all in the difficult times of post Second World War.

At first they made Pani di Giandujot, also known as “the poor people's chocolate,” a sort of gianduiotto chocolate in the shape of a brick, a specialty of Piedmont made with a paste of sugar, cocoa and hazelnut, to be cut into slices. “It was an immediate success,” Michele Ferrero said in a rare interview, “even today we don't really understand how it all happened.”

Yet, this success was nothing compared to the success of Nutella, the inimitable hazelnut chocolate spread that celebrated its 50th anniversary just a year ago. Nutella, originally known as Supercrema, was created in 1951, and it basically was a Giandujot melted by the sun.

Then in 1963 Michele revamped the recipe and renamed the hazelnut spread which ended up being an instant success and still remains widely popular.

Michele Ferrero never studied communications, yet he was blunt and direct and he had a vision... he knew how he wanted his business to grow.

“If we don't become known in Europe, we won't be known in Italy either,” he said back in the 1950's when the business opened in Germany. That was a first step, the beginning of the conquest of several different countries thanks to many different products: Mon Cheri (1956), Tic Tac (1969), Kinder Cioccolato (1968), Kinder Sorpresa (1974) and Ferrero Rocher (1982) (Michele's mom's name was Piera Rocher).

Ideas, hard work and low profile, these are the words that defined his success, but that's not all. Michele Ferrero's life and career were defined by great attention to human values, respect for his homeland and his employees (Mr. Ferrero even bought them a few apartments in Liguria where they could go on vacation).

In 1983 Mr. Ferrero founded the Fondazione Ferrero. “Work, create, donate,” these are the verbs that appear in the logo of this institution dedicated to supporting ex employees and promoting cultural and artistic initiatives. 2005 saw the creation of Imprese Sociali Ferrero, a project which was strongly supported by Mr. Ferrero, which involves real enterprises, not just charitable activities, in India, Cameroon and South Africa, aimed at creating jobs for the needy.

“Michele Ferrero's story is a formidable and unique story,” Maurizio Martina, the Minister of Agriculture, said, “a story written by a real entrepreneur, known in Italy and worldwide,” Italy's neo-president Sergio Mattarella, has added.

Thousands of people have attended his funeral, among them friends, employees, acquaintances and premier Matteo Renzi. The prime minister has used the event as an opportunity to encourage Italians to work hard and succeed.

“He was a great Italian and his story is proof of great talent, nationality and values,” Renzi has reminded all those who complain about the economic conditions of Italy today. There can be so many more stories inspired by the life of Mr. Ferrero who started with nothing and became a worldwide success.

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[2] <http://www.forbes.com/profile/silvio-berlusconi/>

