

UPSTATE New York

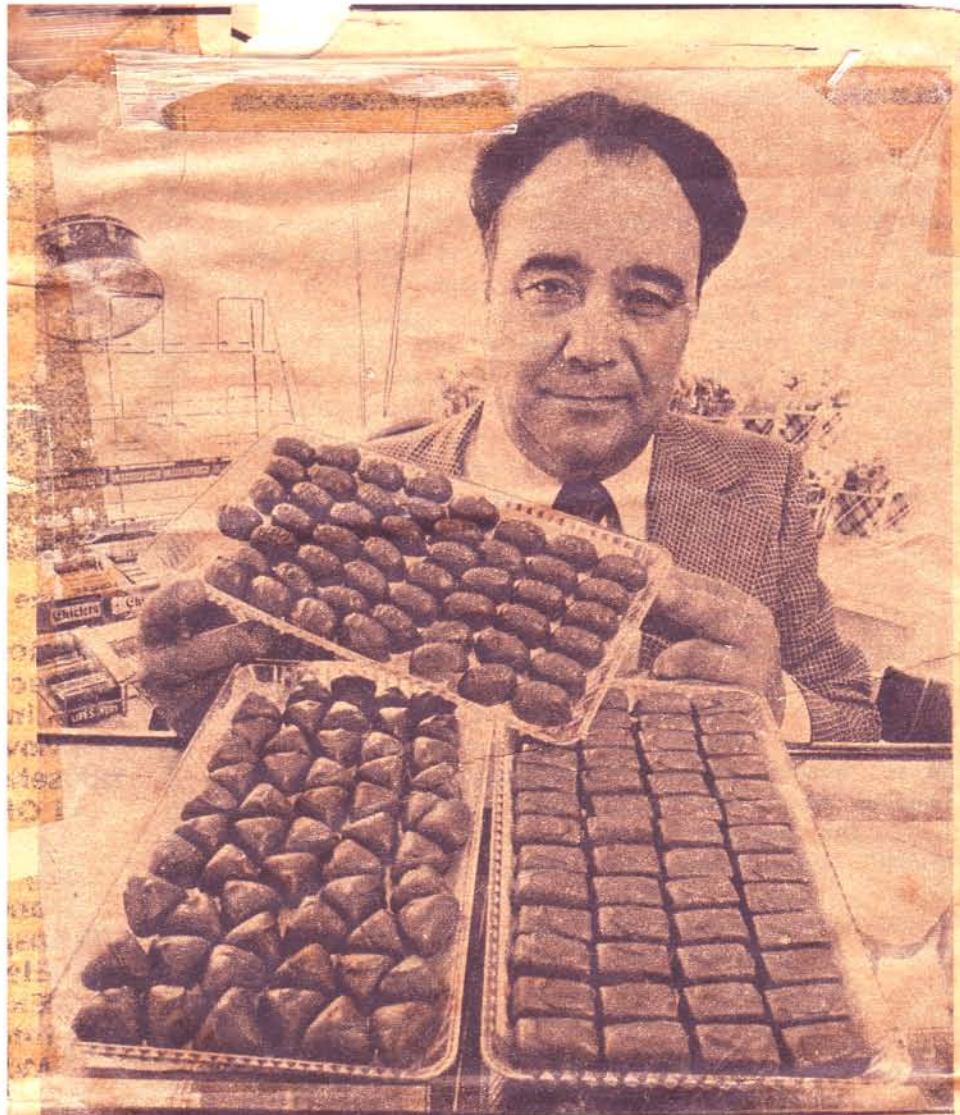
ing on my own, practicing at home in my basement, and I loved it," he says. "But what happens when you make 50, 60, 100 pounds of chocolates? You have to sell them." So he took his candies door to door to build a clientele. Combining his training as a cook and his background in the family restaurant business with his bent for making chocolates, he opened Peter's Sweet Shop on South Clinton Ave. in 1967. (Now located at 831 S. Clinton, it's scheduled to move to new quarters down the street in June.) The restaurant serves dinners, short orders and soda fountain treats as well as offering chocolates for sale.

Easter is Livadas' busiest season for novelty items; the shelves groan with bunnies, baskets, eggs and other Easter regulars. At Christmas, it's Santa Clauses; for Valentine's Day, lovebirds and hearts. "Broken hearts, too," he grins.

Livadas' basement — this time, the one under his restaurant — still serves as headquarters for his chocolate-making activity. Descend the cramped stairway and the pungent sweetness blasts the olfactory nerves. The smell can be an occupational hazard, Livadas says. "I had a boy here who wanted to volunteer to learn the work. By the third day, he ended up in the hospital emergency room," overcome by the fumes of the cocoa, to which he was apparently allergic. "You really have to love the aroma or else you can't do this," Livadas emphasizes. To him, it's like the enjoyment some people profess for the lingering scent of a good cigar. "But I don't smoke," he adds, "so that's a smell I couldn't stand."

The weather this Sunday afternoon is cold and damp, but the humidity isn't too high to spoil the chocolates. "You know from experience

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The chocolates at Peter's Sweet Shop are handmade, with Peter Livadas' special touch. Making chocolates started out as a hobby — and turned into a business venture when Livadas started making more sweets than he could possibly eat.

'I measure by experience, by hand'

what days are good, when the air is dry enough, he says. "This isn't a factory, where the moisture in the air can be controlled. And factories have machines that can pump as many ounces as you want into the mold so that all the merchandise comes out the same. I measure by experience, by hand, so some may come out a little more, some a little less."

Here, everything is handmade, with the accent on the hand. Livadas' thick fingers seem unsuited to the art of confection, but his dexterity seems second nature. His hand is first a scoop, mixing the melting chocolate in a large vat over a double boiler, then ladling

it onto a flat metal tray where it is blended smooth. "The hand is sensitive to differences in temperature in the molten chocolate, so I can make sure the consistency of each piece is the same," he says. "A mechanical mixer can't do that."

Now, his hand becomes a funnel, drooling streams of molten chocolate into Easter bunny molds. Quickly, the mold is tapped to eliminate air bubbles and shaken to remove the excess chocolate, leaving a thin layer that becomes the hollow shell. Another smudge of chocolate daubed on a flat surface becomes the figure's base, on which the mold is set to harden. The mess-

THE CHOCOLATE MAKER

Peter Livadas doesn't make his wares to last a lifetime, and if they have a function, it is to evoke smiles.

But Livadas' handmade chocolates have withstood the test of time, drawing regular customers for his holiday confections and the peanut brittle, fudge, creams and candy bars he sells year-round. What started out as a hobby has become a habit.

"I learned chocolate mak-