

Newsday

Brooklyn's Bagels by Bell weighs moving to Oceanside site

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Jared and Warren Bell of Bagels by Bell at their 10,000-square-foot factory in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn on Friday, Oct. 21, 2016. The company plans to move to a 32,000-square-foot facility in Oceanside. Photo Credit: Anthony Lanzilote

A Brooklyn bagel and bialy maker is considering picking up stakes after 70 years and moving to Long Island.

Bagels by Bell plans to expand to a 32,000-square-foot site in Oceanside. Warren and Jared Bell, father and son owners of the third-generation family business, are seeking tax benefits from Nassau County for the \$2.6 million relocation and renovation project.

“We’re basically outgrowing this facility,” said Warren Bell, 62, who took over the company from his father and founder, Martin Bell. Over the years, the company has seen increased demand for its signature bialys — small, chewy yeast rolls baked with diced onions in the middle — and has racked up large customers like Stop & Shop, ShopRite and Key Food locally, and Publix supermarkets in Florida.

“We have no room. Everybody is working on top of each other,” said Bell, who is president and chief executive.

Inside Bell’s 10,000-square-foot factory in Canarsie, about 40 employees wearing hair and beard nets load and unload trays of bagels and bialys. The cramped space is filled with the scent of freshly baked bread. In many spots, the floor is covered in flour.

The bakery operation rolls out about 72,000 bagels and bialys a day, Bell said. The company has expanded to international markets such as Israel, Korea and Saudi Arabia.

Maneuvering between employees stationed around conveyor belts and industrial ovens, the elder Bell said he could ramp up production at his current site, “but not much.” The plan is to relocate to the larger Oceanside site, automate more of his bagel production and focus on bialys, which have to be made by hand.

“Bialys is where we want to grow,” he said. “I don’t need to compete with everybody else on bagels.”

The Bells initially tried to find a larger space in Brooklyn, but high prices and limited stock pushed them to look in New Jersey and on Long Island. The Bells said a move to Long Island is contingent on getting tax benefits.

Brokers say that high rents in the city, brought on by the construction of apartments and condos, have slowly pushed out many industrial tenants.

Developers can pay \$300 to \$400 per square foot for an industrial site in the boroughs before converting it to high-end residences. By comparison, Island industrial spaces sell for \$100 a square foot or less.

To finance the move to 3333-3345 Royal Ave. in Oceanside and the purchase of new equipment, the Bells have already sold a 6,000-square-foot warehouse and are in contract to sell their Canarsie plant.

“We’ve been pushing for the last three months to get one of our buildings sold so that we could start moving ahead with this,” said Jared Bell, 23, vice president of the 69-year-old company. “We just went to an equipment show in Vegas looking for new equipment for the new place.”

The company has been awarded up to \$400,000 in state tax credits from Empire State Development tied to increased employment goals. The company has also been approved for discounted electricity from PSEG Long Island, and has applied for discounted natural gas from National Grid.

The company is seeking a sales tax exemption on the purchase of new equipment for the Oceanside facility, as well as mortgage recording benefits and property tax benefits from the Nassau County Industrial Development Agency.

The company said it expects its entire workforce will move to the new site, and it plans to hire about 10 employees every year for the first three years after the move. It takes about three to four months to train workers to make bialys.

“It looks very easy, but when you try to do it, it’s extremely difficult,” Jared Bell said.

The IDA is scheduled to review Bagels by Bell’s application for benefits at its Friday board meeting.

CLARIFICATION: Bagels by Bell is considering a move to Oceanside. An earlier version of the story and headline said the company has committed to the move.