

COMPANY PROFILE

CREPINI | BY TAYLOR DOWD

THE CREPINI STORY: family, dreams, and dedication



Crepini Executive team from left to right - Steve Sacchinelli (CFO), Eric Shkolnik (Executive Chairman & Co-Founder), Paula Rimer (CEO & Co-Founder), Yelitza Chavez (Food Safety and Quality Assurance Specialist), Lisa Shkolnik (CMO), Sam Shkolnik (CSO), Ari Shkolnik (COO), and Ann Daw (President).

Husband and wife duo Eric Shkolnik and Paula Rimer, respective Executive Chairman/COO and CEO of Crepini, were introduced to crêpes at a young age. Prior to meeting each other, they were both born in Russia and their families immigrated to the U.S. and settled in NYC. In America, Shkolnik and Rimer both pursued careers in IT and even launched a successful tech company together. All the while, neither of them could stop thinking about the crêpes of their childhood and their desire to introduce them to America. Nearly two decades later, Shkolnik and Rimer finally decided to pursue their dream. Their product was called Crepini: a cross between the Russian Blini and the French Crêpe. Through extensive home based recipe testing, years of company development, and the grit and entrepreneurial spirit of their family, Shkolnik and Rimer now own one of the most successful businesses in the field.

The American Dream

The Crepini story entails much more than its product. The company has been a family effort from its inception and its founders continue to uphold the values of hard work and perseverance. Shkolnik and Rimer took a leap of faith in leaving their corporate careers to pursue their passion and launch the idea as their business. “We decided that we were going to bring the traditional crêpe to America,” says Rimer. “We just had the vision. And that’s how it was born,” she says.

Shkolnik and Rimer had no prior experience in the food industry and completely switched their career paths to focus on their vision. In 2007, the couple went all in to begin developing their take on the crêpe. With no contacts, no equipment, and no prior experience in the food or manufacturing industries, they began testing recipes in their tiny home kitchen and initially envisioned an ecommerce-only business. The couple took their process one step at a time to gradually build the brand.

Shkolnik and Rimer rented shared space on weekdays out of a catering kitchen in Westchester, where they lived at the time. The couple hired some of the catering staff to work for their growing business. Crepini had its first employees. The company was beginning to establish itself and develop into an official business.

In 2008, they attended their first trade show, where several food retailers expressed interest in Crepini. Slowly but surely, Crepini gained traction. With a growing client base, Rimer and Shkolnik decided to move their operations into their first one-machine facility in Brooklyn, where they automated cooking processes and continued research and development. “The product received positive feedback,” says Shkolnik, “but we realized in order to produce and satisfy the growing customer base, we needed to automate.”

The couple moved into a Brooklyn apartment to focus on the business. After striking a deal with NYC public schools, they found the business taking off. Soon enough, the young company had already outgrown the space. Shkolnik and Rimer relocated into a larger two-machine Brooklyn facility as distribution increased.

Zero to Hero

After several years of increased success, Shkolnik and Rimer watched the business plateau. The company poured capital into equipment, emptying their savings accounts to invest in the business without reaching the next level. Rimer and Shkolnik needed a change in approach.

The couple’s son, Crepini’s Chief Sales Officer, Sam Shkolnik, had been working behind the scenes on company development. With experience at trade shows, he developed a relationship with Costco. The retailer took a liking to Crepini products, which were sold in stores. However, the crêpes were considered a dessert, as they were sweet at the time and not an everyday product. Costco asked Crepini to create a savory crêpe with egg white, spinach, and feta. Having never tested the product, Paula cooked up samples in her kitchen (“I was the R&D!” she jokes) while the company pondered how to make the product more versatile and American-ized without requiring such high quantities of cooked egg whites. Ten years after its inception, Crepini’s biggest revelation came in the form of a dream.

Eric Shkolnik awoke in the middle of the night after having a dream about cooking egg whites on a crêpe line. This one small idea, he explains, was exactly the clarity the business needed. He says, “This product took us from ‘zero’ to ‘hero.’” The couple realized they could create healthy, low-calorie egg wraps with no sugar and no carbs. The product was a hit. “It went from the same equipment, same people, same team, same company and instantly was an overnight success,” says Rimer. This idea built the foundation for today’s Crepini products.

The company continued product development and in September, 2019, Crepini moved from Brooklyn into its current 100,000 sq. ft.



Crepini employee placing Grande Egg Wraps with Cauliflower into packaging machine.

facility, located at iPark in Hopewell Junction, NY. The company makes one million Crepini each day. Crepini aims to make its products suitable for a wide range of clients, regardless of their diets. Today’s Crepini wraps are keto- and paleo-friendly, gluten-free and range from eight to 30 calories. Ari Shkolnik, Rimer and Eric Shkolnik’s other son, plays an integral role at Crepini. As Chief Information Officer, he manages the entire manufacturing plant and oversees all operations. Without the dedication of her two sons and their involvement in the company, Rimer emphasizes, Crepini would not be where it is today.

Crepini’s products underwent rigorous testing and correcting to achieve the perfect recipe. Rimer says everybody at the company reports to a higher authority: the consumer. Lisa Shkolnik, Chief Marketing Officer, emphasizes the role of consumer feedback in product development. “We get emails daily. As soon as we see there is a repetitive problem, we fix it,” she says. “We continually improve our packaging and there’s constant investment into new equipment.” The first rendition of the egg wrap contained wheat flour, which received complaints from consumers with Celiac’s disease. Crepini reworked its product to contain a gluten free flour blend instead.

The company offers egg wraps that come in two sizes, grande and

petite. Currently, Crepini offers three varieties: egg wraps with cauliflower, gluten-free grains, and sweet potato and turmeric. These products are available in store, online, and wholesale.

Crepini's products stand out against competitors for their thinness and versatility. Crepini are enjoyed any time of day: breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, a quick pick-me-up snack. They are ready-to-eat and can be made with either savory or sweet fillings.

The Family Dynamic

Today, Crepini has approximately 100 employees. The family-owned business highly values culture and ensuring employee satisfaction. Some Crepini employees even moved to Dutchess County when the company relocated from Brooklyn. "Many of the people who started with us are still here today," says Rimer. "When we began, Crepini was fortunate to hire and nurture the best talent."

Sam Shkolnik explains employee success and growth at the company is a standout. "Almost everyone who's in their position today didn't have experience in what they do now," he says. We really learned this manufacturing process together without any real experience. We're a super collaborative team and we really help each other out."

Eric Shkolnik is a graduate of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program. It was there that he learned the importance of company culture. "We help out moms with their kids. Employees have a place for their dogs to stay," he says. One of Shkolnik and Rimer's favorite routines is lunchtime. "Every day in the office we have lunch together. We talk to our employees, whether it's family or business or



Crepini's East Fishkill production facility. The company plans to expand in 2021.

something funny or something tragic. We're all at the same level at the table."

The company adheres to an open door policy and encourages communication in the workplace. "We have amazing employees," says Rimer. "The pinnacle of our success is our culture and our family. Our employees are like family to us."

Building the Future

Crepini just began leasing an additional 61,000 sq. ft. of space in the iPark warehouse to accommodate the company's growth. The space is

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Crepini employee verifying weight of wrap stack before packaging.

undergoing massive renovations to make room for increased production space. With expansion comes the need to hire additional employees. “Everybody at Crepini gets a chance to move up,” Shkolnik says. Everyone came from the ground up. We want people to bring ideas and innovation.”

With technological advancements in manufacturing,



Crepini employee checking for quality before moving on to be labeled.

Crepini will look to integrate automation into more of its processes. However, Shkolnik and Rimer emphasize the importance of their people and value talent over technology. “Food safety, consumers, family, culture: they are the purpose behind what we do here,” says Rimer. Crepini holds a Global Food Safety Initiative Certification and received the Think Dutchess Large Business of the Year award in 2020. “We report to a much higher authority, the consumer,” Rimer says. “Our number one priority is public health and safety.”

Crepini wraps are sold in grocery stores including Walmart, Aldi, Publix, Costco, Sprouts and soon, Kroger, to name a few. Crepini has an international presence with products available in Canada, Japan, and the Middle East. Next year, the company will launch in Mexico. The team is working towards selling products in Taiwan, South Korea, and China. Crepini’s success has spread across the world and it only anticipates an upward trajectory.

With Crepini already outgrowing its current facility, Shkolnik and Rimer reflect on how quickly the company has grown since moving upstate. By next year, Crepini will produce two million crêpes on ten production lines, doubling its current production number. “We entered with so much enthusiasm and that entrepreneurial spirit of never giving up and always persevering no matter what,” Shkolnik says. “We never imagined it would take only two years to get to this point,” Rimer says. “It’s a dream come true.”

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