

Affordable Knives, family Tradition

By Mike Haskew , Blade magazine, field editor

When Steve Paolantonio joined Colonial® he came back from a three-year hiatus. Seems times were changing in the knife industry, and a positive response to fresh ideas would lay the foundation to future success.

His family's roots in knife manufacturing go back almost a century. His grandfather, Antonio Paolantonio started the A. Paolantonio Cutlery in 1919 after a stint in the U.S. Army during WWI, where he learned the blacksmith trade with the cavalry. Antonio recognized the blend of tradition and foresight that would ensure the future success of a new enterprise.

Founded by Steve's grandfather and his two brothers in 1926, Colonial Knife® had been operated by three generations of the Paolantonio family. By the late 1990's, Steve was the company president.

"The time frame in which I took over was the roughest in the history of Colonial Knife®" he said. "We were dealing with some of the same ills as companies like (the original) Camillus and Schrade. Cost were going through the roof, and large quantities of Chinese imports were flooding the U.S. market and at a fraction of our cost. During a meeting with the board of directors, I had presented my plan to right size the company and bring it back to profitability" Paolantonio continued. "I had a business plan to sell our 90,000 square foot manufacturing facility and to relocate to a modern facility-over the history of the company we had acquired multiples of many of the same assembly and processing equipment-we were a large manufacturer, one of the largest in the U.S. and manufacturing hundreds of thousands of knives annually. With the rush of quality Chinese imports during the 80's-90, our volume dropped to manufacturing just thousands of knives annually."

Today, Colonial knife® is the trade name for Colonial Cutlery International's U.S.-made products, while the imported knives are under the CCI brand. Officially, Colonial Knife® is a subsidiary of CCI.

The historical Colonial market appeal has been that of the affordable knife, well built, and Paolantonio asserts that the entire line of CCI knives is moving quite well these days. Responding to the questions, "What can we do that the public wants to see?" CCI has stepped up to the plate with several strong offerings.

Among the favorites is the Ranger Series, which had been a part of the old Colonial knife® line since 1934. The knives originally included medium-size two-and three-blade stockman patterns. They are being reintroduced in a number of different styles starting with machetes, throwing knives, and switchblades with the "Ranger Grind" to highlight the silkiness of the knife's line and with "Ranger" etched on the blade. With a choice of ATS-34 or 440 series stainless blade and Isoplast™ handle, the Ranger harkens back to the days when Colonial® advertised the Rangers as a "Boys first knife".

Today, Colonial® manufactures official Eagle Scout, Cub Scout and Girl Scout anniversary knives.

Combing the family tradition with a keen sense of the here and now, CCI keeps a well know iconic brand alive and under the Paolantonio flag into its ninth decade. In these trying times, few if any family companies can make the same claim