



WILLY WATERTON The Sun Times

Penny Chapman holds drawings in a temporary plant under construction where ice cream is to be made starting next week.

■ **MARKDALE:** More lines to follow at temporary plant

Chapman's plans to start production

MARIA CANTON
Sun Times staff

Chapman's Ice Cream will start production in Markdale next week at a temporary facility, six weeks after fire destroyed its main plant.

The ambitious plan to rebuild the company's business started days after the Sept. 4 fire that levelled the 150-year-old creamery that had been Chapman's headquarters for 36 years. The com-

pany outsourced work to several smaller operators in southern Ontario, including Belleville and Stoney Creek.

The ultimate goal, however, is to have all of the work back in Grey County and to be at full production by April when a new facility is scheduled to be complete.

Owners David and Penny Chapman are well on their way with what they call Project Phoenix. This week they broke

ground on a 20-acre plot of land next to their temporary production plant, with plans to have the exterior completely closed in by the end of the year.

But it's next week's launch of one production line that will run 24-hours a day, seven days a week, staffed with 25 workers that has Penny Chapman, president of Canada's largest independent ice cream manufacturer, talking.

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■ **CHAPMAN'S**

Almost 100 workers to be brought back

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"It's marvellous," Chapman said yesterday. "It will be similar to the first packages we put out in 1973 and in a way we are back to where we began."

The following week she plans to introduce a second line, to be followed by a third in early November, moves that will bring almost 100 workers back on line in Markdale.

According to Chapman, all of their employees are now back at work, including close to 90 at a facility in Stoney Creek and about a dozen in Belleville. The company provides transportation, hotel accommodations and

meals for workers who have agreed to be sent to other facilities in the interim.

Of the 350 people they employ, the Chapmans kept drivers, officer workers and telemarketers on throughout what they describe as the worst days of their lives.

Immediately after the fire, the husband and wife team announced they would continue to pay staff through a generous insurance policy they paid into for almost 40 years, stunning employees, residents and members of the larger business community.

"Our workers were our main priority. There was never a moment's thought of not making it right and not taking care

of our people," said Chapman.

"It was the right thing to do. How could we abandon the people who have made us what we are? Another option never went through our heads."

The temporary production facility is being constructed in one half of a dry goods storage building two blocks from the original plant, which is now leveled except for its concrete base.

Hundreds of construction and trades workers are putting the finishing touches on the place to have it ready for next week's start date while outside, heavy equipment moves earth in preparation for building to begin on the permanent facility.

The Chapmans made an emergency trip to an auction in Florida last month where they purchased ice cream-making equipment, allowing them to keep their six-week promise to restart production. It can take up to half a year to have all new equipment delivered.

They also purchased a vacant building across the street from the old plant that now serves as their office headquarters. It's cramped and executives are sharing office space, but Chapman says that's just fine for now.

"Right now we are focused on production, production, production. We'll worry about office space later on," she said.