

Taste of Carolina

Red Bird Brand Peppermint

For more than a century, Piedmont Candy Company has been satisfying North Carolina's sweet tooth. It's the story of a family-owned business that created a holiday tradition. BY **ASHLYN STALLINGS**



20
minutes to go from
sugar to finished
peppermint

13,475,000
pounds of liquid
sugar used in
a year

FAST FACTS

2
million pounds sold
each month during the
holiday season

10
million pounds
of peppermint
produced in a year

For many North Carolinians, it wouldn't be the holidays without Red Bird Brand peppermint. The pure Southern pedigree of the brand began in 1890, when Lexington candy-maker Edward Ebelein first spun mint-infused stripes into his basic sugar recipe. More than a century later, the candy remains rooted in the North Carolina Triad. The Piedmont Candy Company (*piedmont*

candy.com), now owned by the Reid family, continues to churn out the sugary goodness using the original recipe (at nearly 5,000 pounds per hour). Edward's three granddaughters sell the finished product from the overflowing bins at The Candy Factory on Lexington's Main Street (15 North Main Street; *sweettoothgifts.com* or 336-249-6770).

"If you had any sinus problems, they'd go away when you walked

through the doors of the Piedmont Candy Company," Jeanne Ebelein Leonard says with a laugh, referring to the intense peppermint aroma. "When my dad and grandfather made it, they would spin the candy out by hand. Now, it's very mechanized—but that same smell is there."

As soon as the peppermint hits your tongue, it's easy to see why Red Bird Brand is North Carolina's unofficial house candy. *