

Item/Focus: Marshmallow Fluff Interview

Time Period: Present Day

Interviewee: Andrew Durkee of Durkee Mower Inc.

Narrator: Dakota Carnes

Episode opens with Flufferette jingle

If you haven't guessed already from that wonderful introduction, we here at the Lynn Museum are not yet finished talking about Marshmallow Fluff. But, it would seem that we're not the only ones.

While developing Episode 2 of Bite-Size Lynnformation, all about the history of Marshmallow Fluff, we reached out to Durkee Mower Inc., located here in Lynn, to see if they would be interested in meeting for an interview. Long story short, they were, and after a few back and forth emails, we set up a date and time, virtually of course, and got started setting up the interview.

Since we did dedicate an episode to the history of Marshmallow Fluff, we knew that this interview should be about something different. But what, we weren't quite sure. So, we began asking around. Family, friends, various group chats. As a random conversation starter, we threw out, "If you were able to ask any question about Marshmallow Fluff, and actually have a chance to get an answer, what would you want to know?" As it turns out, people want to know a lot. Now, we couldn't ask all of these questions, but we did take a few of them, merged a few others, and came up with a question list for our interviewee to answer.

"But who is the interviewee?" I hear you ask. He is none other than Andrew Durkee, son of the current president of the company, John Durkee. He kindly took time

out of his day to meet with us, and to answer all of the random questions we were dying to know.

Some of these questions were a bit silly, yes, formed out of pure curiosity that comes with humanity. Some of them, however, were genuinely focused on the company and the way the product works. Mr. Durkee took all of them in stride, and answered to the best of his ability.

Alright, enough of me droning on and on with this intro and backstory. Let's get into the information we learned during the interview. I'm sure you are also very curious to know.

Right off the bat, the first question we asked Mr. Durkee was "What is it like being a part of such a well known company?".

"It's interesting, because anywhere you go, kind of in the North East, at least, in kind of New England, New York, everyone knows what it is. But nobody knows, we're not a big name business. So everyone knows the name Marshmallow Fluff, but nobody knows the company. You know, whenever anyone asks, 'hey, what do you do?' I say 'Oh, I work for Durkee Mower,' and they're like, 'Who's that?', you know, no one's ever heard of it, I'm like, 'oh, well we make Marshmallow Fluff', and they're like, 'Oh my God, that's so cool! That's awesome!'."

So, it's not the company that is well known, it's the product. But does *everyone* know about the product, too? Apparently, the answer is no.

"We get stories all the time from friends of ours who have moved away, down to even not that far, you know? We have friends who have moved down to Virginia, and

she's like 'No one here eats Marshmallow Fluff, so I've been introducing it to the entire neighborhood'."

It seems as if New Englanders are the only ones who have the privilege of enjoying the gooey white creme, which in itself is an honor. But, as it turns out, that is not the case. We did our research here at Lynn Museum, and we learned that Marshmallow Fluff is an international product, not limited to the East Coast of the United States. Not only that, but those across the pond get an added benefit that we just might be a little jealous of.

"Yeah, I mean, we're in most European countries, we're in a few Asian countries, South Korea, China, Japan. A little bit in the Middle East, Kuwait, Israel. South American countries, Brazil, we sell to. So, yeah it would be a lot, but we found, you know, someone who specializes in that, and that makes it a lot easier on us."

When it comes to selling Marshmallow Fluff overseas, Durkee Mower came to an agreement with their exporter as an incentive to work with them. Not only do they get the two standard flavors, regular vanilla and strawberry, but they also get a caramel flavor that is not available in the U.S.

"The other flavor that we do still make is caramel. It is only overseas, we don't sell it in the U.S. And that is just, that's an agreement that we have with our exporter. So this was, kind of, to help give our guy a little advantage of, 'Hey, here's this product that none of these unofficial guys can get you'. So that one is just an only overseas thing".

So not only is there a caramel flavor of Marshmallow Fluff in existence, but it is not something we in Lynn, or the rest of the United States, are able to get our hands on. Are you jealous? Cause we are.

After hearing about the three flavors of Marshmallow Fluff, we began to wonder about others. Had they tried anything else? Were there different flavors elsewhere that, like caramel, weren't available in the U.S? So, we asked.

"Okay, but yeah, other flavors that we have tried. We have tried quite a few over the years. One of the first ones that they tried back in like, the 70s, so way back, way before my time, way before my dad's time, and this probably isn't that surprising, but one of the first things they tried was to make a peanut butter one. Which, I guess worked fairly well, but they ended up deciding that, because obviously peanuts are an allergen, and they decided that there wasn't really a way we could safely prevent cross contamination between our products, and that the risk just wasn't worth it. More recently, by which I mean in the past 20 years or so, we've tried banana, which smelled incredibly like banana. Like exactly what you think, but the entire, everything smelled like banana, for like days. And we only make, when we do the test batches, we only make like, a small sample batch. So this one small sample batch basically made the entire neighborhood smell like banana for like a week. We've tried peppermint, we've tried pina colada, which we got to smell very much like a pina colada, but it absolutely tasted like nothing. And of course we've tried chocolate, a lot. We've tried a lot of chocolates, and we've never been happy with it".

Could you imagine a world where you could add Marshmallow Fluff on top of your Pina Colada, and have it taste the same? Sounds interesting.

Now, we know that Marshmallow Fluff is most famous for the Fluffernutter sandwich. Marshmallow creme with peanut butter, it's an absolute classic. But, we wanted to know what else Marshmallow Fluff has teamed up with, whether food wise or

even company wise. A product like that can bring in weird relationships, and Mr. Durkee had the perfect example.

“The most unexpected one was actually with the company that we sell to in Canada that does our distribution in Canada is a company called Crosby Molasses, they’re based in New Brunswick. And I think that one is the most unexpected because they are exactly what it sounds like, they are a molasses company. It doesn’t seem to make a lot of sense”.

I know what you’re thinking. Marshmallow Fluff and molasses, how much more sweet can this sugary food get? But, that is not what they teamed up for, I assure you.

“What happened was, back, I don’t even know when this was, it was a long time ago, they used to, they would bring molasses down into the States to sell, and then their trucks would go back empty. And so, they were, back in the day, looking for a product to bring back to Canada that they could then, you know, use that time, the trucks were already going north. ‘What could we bring back to sell in Canada?’ And they approached us, I think it was my grandfather at the time, with the proposition that they would purchase from us and distribute in Canada, and obviously my grandfather said, ‘Yeah, that sounds good’, and they’ve been doing a heck of a job for us”.

Now, with all of this international appeal as well as the love we have for Marshmallow Fluff in the United States, especially in New England, the advertising must be off the charts, right? Not really. When was the last time you saw an ad for Marshmallow Fluff in the paper? Or on TV? It’s been a while, hasn’t it? But that hasn’t done much to slow down sales. People don’t buy Marshmallow Fluff because they saw

an ad for it, they buy it because it was something they loved as a child. It is a home staple, and Durkee Mower Inc knows that.

“We haven’t done advertising in a while, actually. It’s probably been 5 years since we’ve done any advertising and that was mostly just, like a newspaper ad or in a magazine ad, like one page on a magazine kind of thing. You know, when you’re talking about advertising, there’s a couple different reasons you do it. The main one is obviously to attract new customers, and that’s kind of not our main point. We just kind of need to put a reminder out there of, ‘Hey, remember us, remember Marshmallow Fluff. Oh right! That’s that thing that we used to have all the time as a kid or whatever, haven’t had that in a while, maybe I should grab some’ kind of thing”.

So many people look back on Marshmallow Fluff and remember their childhoods, and how they loved it as a kid. Maybe they want the same thing for their kids, maybe they want to relive their own memories. Maybe they never forgot about it in the first place, and it has been a forever staple in their home kitchens. Regardless of why people love Marshmallow Fluff today, it will always be surrounded by nostalgia from everyone who’s had it. And that is something that makes Mr. Durkee incredibly proud to be a part of the company.

“I like to hear people's reactions. I like to see people’s reactions when they talk about Fluff, because it’s very unique when people talk about Fluff and they’re, you know, ‘Oh, I loved that when I was a kid and it brings back all these happy memories!’. And that’s awesome to hear because I don’t hear that when anyone talks about most other food products. I think it just, it’s really that kind of nostalgia, that it reminds them of childhood, that it reminds them of some sort of happy memory. And I hear that from

almost everyone when they talk about it, and that's great that it makes people feel like that. That it makes people happy. That it makes them relive these memories of childhood, and that's a nice feeling. That's fun".

We here at the Lynn Museum are grateful for the chance to talk to Mr. Durkee, and we thank him again for taking the time to hear our questions. It's not often you get to learn about a product you've grown up with from a direct, inside source. Especially a product that provides so much joy and fondness. Marshmallow Fluff is so important to us that we had two whole episodes on it, and that really says a lot. If you want to go back and listen to the first episode we did, it is Episode 2 of Bite-Size Lynnformation. And, I think we end the way we started. With that really fun Flufferette jingle.

Episode ends with Flufferette jingle

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