

# McKeesport company has solution to shortage of candy hearts

John H. Prince stocked up on the popular Valentine's Day items.

By JIM BUSCH

For the *MV Independent*

America has a heart problem — a candy heart problem — but a Mon Valley company has the cure.

Media outlets from the New York



Prince

Times to the major television networks have reported on the nationwide shortage of Valentine's Day Conversation Hearts. The popular heart-shaped candies imprinted with messages like "Be Mine," or

"Luv U" have been a Valentine's Day tradition for decades.

The makers of these sweet, crunchy treats, the New England Confection Company (NECCO), were forced to close their factory earlier this year. Though another firm purchased the rights and the recipe for Valentine Conversation Hearts, they did not have time to get them into production for this year's holiday.

But if your Valentine's Day plans include wooing your beloved with these sweet treats, there's no reason to worry. You can still find them in McKeesport.

McKeesport Candy Company and its sister firm, CandyFavorites.com have been shipping conversation hearts to candy lovers from coast to coast for weeks and still have plenty in stock.

Jon H. Prince is the third-generation operator of the McKeesport candy distributor. When he learned that NECCO was shutting down, Prince anticipated the demand for the popular candy and placed a large order. Founded in 1927 by Ernest Prince, McKeesport Candy originally supplied candy to the neighborhood stores of that era. His son, Gerald, led the company through the economic changes in the second half of the 20th century.

When Jon H. Prince took over the family business, it was already the oldest independent candy distributor in the nation. He realized the potential of the internet and in the early 2000s started selling candy direct to consumers.

Today the website, [www.candyfavorites.com](http://www.candyfavorites.com), features more than 3,000 items. Prince's site is one of the most active sites selling candy on the internet and it ships an average of 200 orders per day from its McKeesport warehouse.

**CANDY HEARTS • A2**

**Kara Schidek packs some of the day's orders for shipping at McKeesport Candy Co. and CandyFavorites.com.**

Jim Busch /

*Mon Valley Independent*



## CANDY HEARTS FROM A1

During the Christmas season, the company's daily orders fill an entire UPS truck. During a brief interview with Prince, he received more than a dozen orders, including Haribo Gummy Dinos for Florida, Spearmint Leaves for New Jersey, a Hershey Bar variety pack for Dallas, Texas, and DC Comics Pez dispensers for Roseville, Calif.

Online sales account for the bulk of McKeesport Candy Company and CandyFavorites.com's sales.

The company's warehouse covers a full city block along Fifth Avenue in the East End of McKeesport — the same spot it has been since the company opened. As the business grew, the Prince family purchased the adjoining buildings, knocking out walls to expand warehouse space.

Inventory features a mindboggling array of candy. In addition to popular

favorites, they have unusual selections like "Trump's Hair Cotton Candy" a butterscotch tribute to the president, and Mexican jalapeno M&M's. Prince and his employees are constantly searching for new products to offer their customers.

Because candy plays such a significant role in our childhood memories, McKeesport Candy and CandyFavorites.com specializes in selling "Retro Candy." On the company's website, shoppers can browse through a selection of candies grouped by the decade when they were most popular. Selections include "Charleston Chews" from the 1920s, Razzles from the 1960s and Sour Patch Kids from the 1980s.

Decade-themed candy variety boxes are popular birthday and anniversary gifts.

After more than nine decades in the

same location, McKeesport Candy and CandyFavorites.com remains committed to the city.

"This company has seen the city's rise and we've seen its decline," Prince said. "The city has been good for us and our employees. After 92 years we're still one of the best kept secrets in the Mon Valley. We ship candy to all 50 states, but many local people still drive to the strip district to buy candy."

"Just in this section of Fifth Avenue, there are four multigenerational businesses, Minerva Bakery, McKeesport Novelty, Lich Paper and us. We've all been here for decades and we're all successful."

"After spending my life in this business, it's still a lot of fun," Prince added. "There are more profitable businesses, but candy makes people happy."