



Irene Szyliowicz
President and Co-Founder
Mont Blanc Gourmet

While living in the United Kingdom, Irene Szyliowicz and her husband, Joe, frequented top chocolate shops to enjoy the tastes and scents of chocolate at its finest. They often joked that upon moving back to the United States, Irene would need to learn to make high-quality chocolate to appease Joe's discriminating sweet tooth. This is what compelled her to found Mont Blanc Gourmet. As president of the organization, she has provided premium chocolates, syrups and drink mixes to companies in the United States and around the world.

After completing her Ph.D. in comparative literature, Irene and her son Michael decided to take some time off to learn about something they really loved – gourmet cooking, specifically gourmet chocolate-making. They enrolled at Ecole de Paris des Métiers de la Table, “Paris School of Culinary Arts,” and worked hand-in-hand with their instructor to design their own curriculum. After being classically trained as chocolatiers, learning the deepest secrets of the trade, Irene and Michael decided to give the chocolate business a try in the United States.

Utilizing connections they made while in France, they found the machinery they needed to get their business started in 1985. The mother and son installed a professional kitchen in their basement, and while Michael honed in on perfecting their products, Irene crafted creative and strategic sales tactics to get their gourmet chocolates offered in places like The Plaza Hotel, Ritz Carlton hotels, Bloomingdale's, Marshall Field's and even Pope John Paul II's airplane.

In 1989, the company created the first all-natural, instant, gourmet cocoa mix, and in 1991, began supplying it to coffee shops and cafés. In 1995, they launched a line of premium syrups and drink mixes that were a big success as coffee shop chains continued to experience rapid growth. Even as they grew and gained a national reputation, Irene and Michael maintained a commitment to their homegrown roots; though she now travels worldwide to promote Mont Blanc's products, Irene still keeps on a first-name basis with her clients and keeps detailed notes of each one's needs, wants and preferences.

Irene Szyliowicz Bio
Page Two

This strategic partnership of mother and son continues to flourish. Mont Blanc Gourmet now has more than 12 employees and annual sales in excess of \$13M. In the past three years, the company has been on *Inc.* magazine's listings of "America's Fastest Growing Private Companies" and in the *Denver Business Journal's* list of the "Fastest Growing Companies in Colorado."

###