

Creative and Colorful: Crayola's Unparalleled Products Sketch a Bright Future

Published by Nathaniel Chambers on August 26, 2024



Crayola – the manufacturer of crayons, markers, paints, modeling compounds, and Silly Putty whose household name brings joy to creators of all ages around the world – has its roots right here in Pennsylvania.

Founded by cousins Edwin Binney and Charles Smith in New York City in 1885, the team moved to the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, in 1900, claiming the area's natural resources as one of the determining factors. Operating out of an old mill on the Bushkill Creek, those early days were focused on making slate pencils from nearby quarries.

After transitioning to producing dustless chalk, Binney and Smith moved on to the product that Crayola is best known for today – safe, affordable crayons. The duo made their first crayons in 1903. Over 120 years later, Crayola is a global brand.

Today, Crayola has three manufacturing facilities in the Lehigh Valley, where they employ about 1,200 of their 2,000 global workers. Across those facilities, Crayola manufactures 13 million crayons, 3 million markers, 500,000 jars of paint, 170,000 pounds of modeling compound, and 22,000 Silly Putty eggs each day. The company has an additional 800,000 square-foot distribution center in nearby Bethlehem, which allows them to respond to U.S. customer demands quickly and efficiently. This smooth operation chain – from production to distribution – is a factor in helping Crayola maintain its superior brand.

Location is also key. While Crayola attracts talented workers from outside the region, partnerships with local colleges and universities provide a qualified pool of interns and future employees. Major highways, airports, an intermodal rail yard, available warehousing space, and proximity to ports make it easy to set up operations and deliver products to customers around the globe in an efficient, cost-effective manner.

Keeping Crayola at the head of the pack is its Pennsylvania-native CEO, Pete Ruggiero. Ruggiero grew up in Pen Argyl, a borough in the Lehigh Valley, and he brings “slate belt” values to his role daily. He is passionate about representing an iconic Pennsylvania company with worldwide reach, and he spreads that passion to his employees.

Ruggiero joined Crayola in 1997 and has been an integral component of several change-making teams that built Crayola into a leading innovation company. A few examples include enabling the expansion of Crayola’s U.S. and international business units (which have transformed the company’s global supply chain); and executing numerous sustainability initiatives, including a three-megawatt solar farm at Crayola’s corporate headquarters in Easton, PA.

When speaking about Crayola’s community involvement, Ruggiero’s passion shines through.

“Fostering a giving spirit and helping others is a cornerstone of Crayola’s culture,” Ruggiero said. “Crayolians volunteer more than 10,000 hours each year to local nonprofit agencies. We support two United Way Community Schools in Easton – Paxinosa and Cheston. It is important to our employees that we support and inspire the next generation through art, creativity, and a quality education.

“We know children need to have their physical and emotional needs met to succeed in school. Crayola believes we can positively impact the lives of local students by ensuring that they have food, clothing and other necessities. We donated \$1.2 million to the community last year through the United Way. We also provided product donations and grants to local nonprofit agencies throughout the Lehigh Valley.”

Crayola also focuses on expanding creativity through its five Crayola Experiences. These immersive, entertaining attractions, which all range between 20,000 and 60,000 square feet across Pennsylvania, Florida, Minnesota, Texas, Arizona, and coming soon to Tennessee, are not only fun for kids (and adults), but also educational and memorable. From naming and wrapping Crayola crayons to watching how crayons are made, starring in a coloring page, creating melted wax spin art, and more, Crayola Experiences help kids and adults explore art and technology, express their creativity, and experience color in a new way.

What’s next for a company that’s already brought so much brightness and life to the world?

“We will continue to expand our brand and product lines so children around the world can express themselves through creativity,” Ruggiero said. “We intend to make the world a more colorful place, one smile at a time. We will continue to invest in manufacturing and logistics operations in the Commonwealth, as the model provides a strategic competitive advantage for Crayola.”

Innovation is the key word behind Crayola’s future growth and success trajectory. The ongoing development of several digital applications, such as Create & Play, Scribble Scrubbie Pets and Crayola Adventures, along with toys aimed at sparking creativity, will build Crayola for the next quarter of a century.

“We are excited about our future!” Ruggiero exclaimed, giving all the credit to his team. “None of this would be possible without the work and dedication of Crayola employees. We appreciate all they do to create fun, creative experiences for our consumers. We also appreciate all they do in our community – volunteering, serving on boards, and donating to local nonprofits.”

Thanks to Crayola, there’s more color, vibrancy, and joy in Pennsylvania, its economy, student learning, and the world around us.