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<b>Title</b>	<i>LEAD: BizTrend: Puratos wins 1st BLCCJ award for successful firm in Japan</i>

Belgian chocolate brands such as Godiva, Neuhaus and Leonidas are popular in Japan, yet not many people are probably aware of the fact that they are consuming chocolate-linked food with ingredients made by another Belgian player, the Puratos Group of Brussels.

But the winning by Puratos Japan Co., a Japanese unit of Puratos, a supplier of ingredients to chocolate, bakery and confectionery, of a new award for the most successful company conducting businesses between Japan and Belgium and Luxembourg is likely to give the company higher exposure in Japan.

The Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan will present the first “Nippon Export Award” to Puratos Japan during a ceremony to be held Thursday in Tokyo, with the attendance of Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Shoichi Nakagawa.

The BLCCJ created the prize to recognize efforts by Belgian, Luxembourg and Japanese companies to boost trade and investment between Japan and the two European states. At present, about 1,500 companies are involved in businesses between the two sides.

Puratos Japan, whose clients include major patisseries, bakeries and hotels across the country, beat two other contenders because it has brought “innovative concept” for the whole Puratos group in product development, quality assurance and marketing strategy based on high demand from Japanese consumers, said Luxembourg Ambassador to Japan Michele Pranchere-Tomassini, who is one of a five-member screening committee.

The two other contenders were Frisk International NV, a Belgian food company that conducts businesses in Japan teaming up with Tokyo-based Kanebo Foods Ltd., and Konishi Brewing Co., Japan's largest importer of Belgian beer based in Itami, Hyogo Prefecture.

“They have developed new products based on Japanese consumer needs, namely less sweet and more sophisticated ones, along with new servicing and merchandizing policies. And they have managed to make these Japanese original concepts for the whole Puratos network,” Pranchere-Tomassini told Kyodo News.

“So there is a real input from Japan, or I would say, a Japanese added-value,” she said, summing up views from the committee that also includes Tomiichi Akiyama, honorary advisor of Sumitomo Corp. and Hajime Sawabe, president of TDK Corp.

“It's not only working in Japan, trying to get the Japanese market, but it's what can you learn from entering the Japanese market to make a success worldwide,” she said, citing growing synergy between the Puratos head office and Puratos Japan following a 2001 tour to Japan by Puratos executives.

In what Puratos called “Banzai Quality Tour,” Duco Delgorge, general manager of Puratos Japan, invited Puratos executives such as Chairman Eddy Van Belle, factory managers and quality assurance managers to Japan from the Brussels head office for a week to actually see the Japanese market.

“They came back to Europe with an incredible number of ideas, and with the will to further invest in quality, and we've seen over the years after Banzai Quality Tour significant investments in the factory, and a change in the mentality of people towards quality as one of the key issues,” Delgorge said.

Delgorge, also vice chairman of the European Business Community in Japan, a major foreign business lobby in Japan, said net sales have grown 16 percent on average since he took the helm of Puratos Japan in 1995, adding that net profits have also risen accordingly.

Net sales is projected to total 2.7 billion yen in 2004, up from 700 million yen in 1995, due to what Delgorge termed “tailor-made product development” by taking into account the needs and tastes of Japanese consumers.

“The quality level of our products is very high,” he said. “The quality assurance is very good by European standards. Demand from Japan and Japanese customers is much higher than that of Europe.”

Delgorge recalled the Banzai tour was a great success, quoting executives at the Puratos head office as saying, “We will use Japan as our benchmark to get the highest quality level which allows us to compete effectively and internationally in all countries, rather than saying, We are doing this only for Japan. No, we're using Japan as our quality benchmark.”