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Tourism Notes, D2

MADE IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

They've got the scoop for sweet teeth

Boynton Beach-based Ice Cream Club responds to demand by diving into direct-to-consumer market.

By Susan Sallsbury
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BOYNTON BEACH — At the Ice Cream Club's manufacturing plant in Boynton Beach, Heather Draper hears from them almost every day — the people who say they can't live without their favorite flavor of the artisan-style ice cream.

They need their fix of malt ball fudge or salty caramel peanut, and they want to know where they can buy some. They may have indulged in one or more of the 175-plus flavors while vacationing where the Ice Cream Club's product is served at a parlor, restaurant or country club.

Sometimes, the customers with the crave don't live near a place that serves the 14 percent butterfat brand known for its many flavors and oversized inclusions from cake pieces to cherries and chocolate chips.

But that won't matter as much starting in mid-April, when the company will begin offering shipments of six pints of any flavors the customer selects packed in dry ice for \$79 directly to customers' homes in 48 states.

"We're starting direct-to-consumer sales due to demand," Draper, a director at the company, said. "It's also unique gift for someone who has everything. Who doesn't love ice cream?"

The pint-sized deliveries will be the latest change for the company that since 1982 has grown from selling by the scoop at one shop in Manalapan to supplying 1.2 million gallons a year to 500 accounts in 10 Southeastern states and the Caribbean Islands.

But being nimble and small enough to quickly innovate is part of the beauty of own-



The Ice Cream Club in Boynton Beach produces dozens of flavors, including (clockwise from left) Special Mint Chip, Salty Caramel Peanut, Dulce de Leche, Caramel Caribou, Stellar Coffee and Red Raspberry (center). The company will begin shipping ice cream to customers in mid-April. BILL INGRAM / THE PALM BEACH POST

ing a business of its size, say co-founders CEO Rich Draper, who is Heather Draper's husband, and Tom Jackson, executive vice president.

"We look at it like we are a start-up. We are always trying to do new things," Rich Draper said recently at the company's 18,000-square-foot plant. "We are never going to be the mass-produced low-price ice cream throughout the country. We like to do special flavors. That has always been our strategy."

Jackson and Draper were classmates at the University of Illinois and were looking for an entrepreneurial-type business to get into.



Heather Draper, a director at the Ice Cream Club, says their product makes a unique gift.

"We weren't looking at following the traditional route. We heard about this shopping center being built in Florida — Plaza Del Mar. We came down and looked at it, and it looked like a good spot for an ice cream shop," Rich Draper said.

The center was under construction, which gave them time to figure out how to get

started.

"There wasn't someone like us — then," Draper said. "We went to a restaurant show in Chicago. We found a guy in a little booth selling an ice cream machine."

"We bought his machine and he told us about suppliers and so forth. When we opened the store we were pretty green. We had a select amount of flavors. When the customers came in, we were making ice cream in the back of the store, and they would say, 'You have to try this. We had this in Philly,'" Draper recalls.

So from the initial 16 flavors, the list grew and grew as



- Started as a single ice cream shop in Manalapan in 1982
- Headquartered in Boynton Beach
- Makes 14 percent butterfat premium ice cream in 175 flavors
- Makes more than 70 flavors of soft-serve yogurt
- Distributes to 600 accounts such as ice cream shops and restaurants
- Not sold in grocery or retail stores

customers made suggestions.

The company still owns the Manalapan store, and it's still using the original basic ice cream recipe.

A year or so later, they opened a second store at Crystal Tree Plaza in North Palm Beach, which is now operated by a licensee who purchases the Ice Cream Club's products.

"We started doing more wholesale. Restaurants were asking about our products. In the mid-1980s we decided to go the wholesale route rather than more retail. We began selling to other ice cream shops, retirement communities, country clubs and hotels," Draper said.

In addition to premium ice

Ice cream continued on D6



Coleman Kelleher stirs strawberry ice cream in the mixing room of The Ice Cream Club plant in Boynton Beach. He and other workers churn out the delicious treat at the company's 18,000-square-foot plant. BILL INGRAM / PALM BEACH POST

Ice cream

continued from D1

cream, they make such other products as no-sugar-added reduced-fat ice cream, sherbets, 96.5 percent fat free yogurts, fat-free yogurt and more.

Among the local clubs that serve the company's products are Broken Sound, Polo Club and Boca Pointe in Boca Raton, Aberdeen west of Boynton Beach, The Everglades Club and The Bath & Tennis Club, both in Palm Beach and The Breakers Top of the Point in West Palm Beach.

Bud Hochberg, owner of Polar Bear Ice Cream, with three shops in Key West and one in Jasper, Ga., said he's been selling the Ice Cream Club's products for 18 years, and he finds that customers love the gourmet ice cream.

"I met with Rick and absolutely fell in love with the guy and his mindset in business and how he wanted to handle things," Hochberg said.

Hochberg said that in Key West, Key Lime flavors are a big seller, and in Georgia, creamy praline is popular. He usually has 35 flavors available at one time, and rotates 120 flavors.

Andy Kobosko of Kobosko's Kreamery, Wel-



The Ice Cream Club's Executive Vice President Tom Jackson (left) and CEO Richard Draper went from being classmates in college to entrepreneurs.



lington, said when he opened his store eight years ago, he considered making his own ice cream, but then sampled Ice Cream Club's at a trade show. Now he's happy to be selling 45 of their flavors.

"I've never had a complaint. Almost daily I hear compliments about either their yogurt or their ice cream. I got 62 three-gallon tubs today. It's crazy right now. Normally, we go through 50 tubs a week," he said.

Kobosko said the company's service is excellent too.

"They are small business people who grew big. They know what it is like to be a small business owner," Kobosko said.

Children love the red, yellow and blue Superman ice cream, which is just plain vanilla, and they also like the birthday cake flavor, he said.

The Drapers and Jackson say one of the reasons their ice cream is so creamy is that they still use old-fashioned methods such as hand-laddling. Ingredients such as

strawberries are ladled in as layers of ice cream flow into the tub.

Jackson said that there are more ingredients now because more are available, but even in the early years, they were known for the many inclusions.

"We did a lot of that back then. That is why people liked it. We put a lot of big ingredients in. Garbage Can is a perfect example. It has seven candy bars in it," Jackson said.

Jackson recalls the licorice ice cream that was a flop, and said, "We try to do unique flavors, but it has to sell."

A couple of years ago

they introduced Mexican Hot Chocolate ice cream, which has a cayenne pepper kick, at the Florida Restaurant Show, thinking it would never catch on.

"They blogged about it, and people were forming a line," Heather Draper said of the flavor that turned out to be a keeper.

While the better-for-you category such as no-sugar-added makes up about 20 percent of sales, most people still want to consume ice cream.

"It's a product that brings a lot of happiness and joy to people," Rich Draper said. "We use all top quality ingredients. It is a great, indulgent snack. We really see the indulgent artisan-style ice cream growing in popularity as people want more unique flavors."

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