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March 8, 2013



ROXANNE BROWN / DAILY COMMERCIAL

Jack Stellhorn, co-owner of Ritter's Frozen Custard in Clermont makes up a batch of Balsamic Strawberry custard to debut during the company wide rollout of "foodie flavors."

published: Friday, March 08, 2013

Ritter's Frozen Custard offers unique flavors

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Foodies everywhere -- well at least in Texas and Florida for now -- get your spoons ready for the newest flavor Ritter's Frozen Custard rolled out just for you.

It's 'avocado banana' and it's the fourth of eight flavors intended to "turn the world of ice cream up side down."

Fred Kirvan, COO of Ritter's, also known as TRUFOODS, LLC, said all eight flavors appeal to the taste buds and are ones associate with "foodies."

Kirvan along with Gary Occhiogrosso, Ritter's Development Officer, who were charged with the endeavor are both self-proclaimed foodies.

"We wanted to come up with flavors that were chef inspired or more 'European' in nature; cool, unique flavors that would differentiate ourselves from the world of ice cream," Occhiogrosso said of his original inspiration behind the company's new flavors. "We felt there was a definite void in the "ice cream" world and since no one in the frozen custard world was doing these flavors either, we wanted to be the first and best players in this category."

"It was easy too, because people today, as a result of the food network and cooking shows everywhere, are keen to trying new flavors, especially those from an international scope. That's the void we've filled."

From Feb. 8-10, Ritter's rolled out its first foodie flavor: Spicy Chocolate, followed by Nutty Aunt Ella on Feb. 15-17, Balsamic Strawberry from Feb, 22-24 and Avocado Banana from March 1-3.

Today through Sunday the new foodie flavor is Lavender Pomegranate and after that, there are still three more to come.

They are: Green Tea from March 15-17, Three Gingers from March 22-24 and Lemon Basil from March 29-31.

So far, the new flavors are only being introduced in Florida and Texas. In April, a whole new rollout of the eight flavors will be initiated in the northern states beginning with Indiana and Michigan.

Franchise owners Jack and Diane Stellhorn who own the Ritter's in Clermont, located at 2560 E. Highway 50, Suite 114, called the introduction of the new flavors "exciting."

Diane Stellhorn said customers are receptive and eager to try the new tastes.

In fact, Jack Stellhorn said he has customers just waiting for the next week to get here, so they can go into the store and try the next flavor.

Occhiogrosso said many emails have come into the corporate office as well, from people expressing dismay because they will be out of town when the next new flavor is to be introduced.

As of now, Diane Stellhorn said that in Clermont, the most popular flavor has been the Balsamic Strawberry, edging out the Spicy Chocolate, another favorite, but just a tad.

"The Spicy Chocolate was so popular with that little kick to it. People just fell in love with it, but the Balsamic Strawberry just flew out of here," Stellhorn said, adding that although people were wondering about the Avocado Banana flavor, it was well liked for its earthy, organic flavor, as well.

Jack referred to signage in the store that to him says it all.

"Gourmet inspired flavors that are a daring new scoop of something truly different," the sign reads.

"People like different, and based on the reactions and excitement, I think Clermont people really appreciate these new flavors," Dianne said, adding that they too were thrilled with the new flavors, especially since one of them -- the Nutty Aunt Ella flavor which is based on the ever popular 'Nutella' chocolate and hazelnut spread -- was invented by the couple themselves.

"We've been here eight years now, so our customers are like our family. We know them and we have kind of gotten to the point where we gauge what they like and don't like right away," Diane said, adding that another flavor of theirs, called waffle nut crunch, has also been picked up by the company recently.

She said they came up with the idea after deciding that they did not want to just throw away the bits and pieces of waffle cones that got crunched or toss the ingredients leftover after they dipped their cones tips in chocolate and nuts.

"We though, we can make something out of this, tried it and people really like it. The company has been so receptive with us inventing new flavors," she said.

On January 18, the Clermont store received an award for the Number One in-line store (store in a shopping plaza), and for three years in a row, has received the company's 'award of excellence.'

"We work hard and we like to part of these things," Diane said.

Kirvan said they encourage every store franchisee to try new things and work with their customers and the company on kick starting new trends and excitement.

In fact, the very first batch of spicy chocolate came of Occhiogrosso's own kitchen.

"Yeah, he came into the office and was like "Try this, try this," Kirvan said.

The whole process of coming up with the flavors and recipes, taste testing, tweaking and perfecting them was a six month long process.

The final step occurred at a conference attended by all store owners, who tried every new flavor and gave each one a "thumbs up."

"Once we had our store owners on board with and excited about the flavors, we knew it would be easy to get our customers on board as well," said Kirvan, adding that for those worried they've missed a flavor or would like to try one again, the newbies will be added to the rotation of flavor each store make fresh daily from here on out.

Vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and light vanilla are staples every day, he said, but there are 150 flavors of custard, sherbets and Italian ices that are rotated, depending on the availability of fresh ingredients and weekly features.

Jack also said people should not feel too guilty about trying the new flavors, or any flavors at any time, because the butter fat percentage in the Ritter's brand is less than 10 percent, resulting in a small 6 ounce cup of it being under 200 calories.

A kiddie cup, he said, is under 100 calories.

Not only that, but the taste, Jack said, is indescribable.

Occhiogrosso calls is "ultra premium."

"The difference between frozen and soft serve ice cream is the amount of air quantity. The custard ends up with less than 10 percent air quantity because the process we use allows us to control it compared to making soft serve, which usually contains close to 100 percent air," Jack said. "It makes a difference and you can instantly taste it in the custard because it is so creamy, rich and smooth."

And with the company's constant strive for excellence, along with the foodie in him and thousands of flavor possibilities, the eight new flavors may not be the last, according to Occhiogrosso.

"I'm not saying one way or another at the moment, but what I am saying is that there are a lot of flavor profiles that have not yet been explored at this point," Occhiogrosso said. "And so as customers' pallets continue to become more sophisticated and more open, we may work on introducing more new flavors."

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