

A little shop with big flavor in Queens

Everybody screams for Max and Minna's ice cream on Main Street

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In a world of big-box corporate stores and national franchises, a tiny ice cream shop on Main Street in Kew Gardens Hills still stands tall.

Max & Mina's, located at 71-26 Main St., is a family-owned store and wholesale business known for its adventurous and often wild flavors.

"Our main goal is for people to expand their taste boundaries and not limit themselves on the basic ice creams," said Bruce Becker, who owns the store with his brother, Mark.

The business, according to Becker, is based on family recipes. Their grandfather, Max, was an organic chemist and often developed different flavors of ice cream for the two brothers to try as children.

"He was able to break down properties, and he made some funky stuff for us as kids," Becker said. "He basically just threw a bunch of stuff in there. He had no boundaries."

Their grandfather's recipe book, which Becker kept in a safety deposit box for over a decade before looking at it, served as the basis of the business the brothers would start and name after their grandparents years later as adults.

Becker said the number of similar ice cream businesses across the country and being called "the future of ice cream" by the Travel Channel are testaments to the hard work he and his brother have put into the operation.

"Now you can go to almost every city, every state and you'll find a quaint ice cream manufacturer making something that's different and brings a different taste to the table," he said. "When we started doing it, we had no idea that it would morph into this."

Becker said that they are always looking to bring new tastes to the market, and mentioned apple cobbler, pumpkin rum cake, caramel apple and candy apple as some of their latest offerings.

The ice cream is kosher and some of the more unusual flavors they've featured include lox, sweet and spicy Cajun, wasabi, beer and carmel nuts, corn on the cob and pizza.

As much success as they have had selling ice cream from the store, Becker said the majority of their business comes from wholesaling. The firm has provided ice cream for companies and events all over the city, including movie premieres and corporate parties.

"We sell to Bloomingdales, Dylan's Candy Bar, burger places and steakhouses," he said. "Our taste isn't just confined to [Queens]. Wholesaling provides a lot more ice cream to people than the store."

According to Becker, despite the dismal economic climate, the store hasn't seen too much of a downturn in business.

"We're sort of bucking the trend," he said. "We have a customer base from everywhere."

Becker said that because his business is selling ice cream from a store and also wholesaling, it changes the equation.

"A lot of people are struggling out there and small businesses are really having a hard time, but we're sort of the exception," he said. "If we were just selling to the public, we would be struggling."

Becker said that in this economy, a lot of family businesses have been eliminated, so "when you see a first-generation family enterprise stay together and then become a second-generation business, it's a testament [to all the work]."

His children and his nephews, he said, enjoy working at the store. "And I feel the same love to be around it as they do."

He noted that the business is outgrowing its space in Flushing and that "when the time comes, we will look and evaluate what the next step will be."

Store hours continuing through the winter, now in effect, are noon to 8



Bruce Becker, who co-founded Max & Mina's ice cream with his brother Mark in their Kew Gardens Hills shop. The brothers