

Ice cream shop thrives in improved location



Cristina Webb shares ice cream with her daughter Grace. Julie and Aimee, right, Diefenbach enjoy ice cream on a Sunday afternoon at The Hop. Owned by UNC Asheville alumni, the ice cream shop attracts many of the university's faculty and students. The girls' father is Mass Communication professor Don Diefenbach.

Sulkira Song - Staff Photographer

UNCA alumni use education to prepare for small business world

By Heide Penner

STAFF WRITER
HMPENNER@UNCA.EDU

Locally-owned retro ice cream cafe The Hop invites students and other Asheville residents to enjoy a scoop of homemade ice cream in a funky environment.

"The Hop was a retro building, a retro name, and it just makes people think of a simple time when you could eat ice cream and twist the night away," said owners and UNC Asheville alumni Ashley and Greg Garrison.

Disrepair along with costly cooling prompted the move of The Hop to its present location in Merrimon Square.

"The previous building was a rental space," Ashley said. "Unfortunately, the property was neglected a fair amount of time after the last renovation in the mid-'90s. There was no air conditioning - temperatures would easily reach 100 degrees in the summer with hot exhaust pouring in from the drive-through and the coolers blowing hot air on us - and we had very little indoor seating and little parking."

The space also proved hard to keep clean because of a bad roof.

"We scooped with buckets littering the floor to catch the water if it was raining so we wouldn't slip in puddles," she said.

"The previous owners were approached about moving to Merrimon Square and decided it was a good decision when they were faced with the property owner asking them to replace the roof."

In August, the Garrisons became the fifth owners of The Hop in 31 years.

"I had been employed by the previous owners since August 2003. Greg was also employed in 2005-06 for about 18 months," she said.

Because of the move, the past owners held a mural contest for the interior of the new location, adding to the theme.

"Larkin Ford, a then-UNCA art student, submitted a unique and fun rendition of a sock-hop in our old location," Greg said. "The details of the mural were left up to him, and in December of 2007, he finished the now-funky ice cream-inspired animal dance scene."

The names of the flavors, such as the Jitterbug, a milkshake with espresso, also stem from the general sock-hop theme.

"They make really great milkshakes," said Courtney Metz, a senior double majoring in mass communication and management.

The Hop uses natural ingredients such as Madagascar pure vanilla extract, contributing to the quality of their ice cream.

"The amount of flavors is limitless, but we typically keep in 14 to 16 regular flavors, one to three vegan/gluten-free flavors, as well as sorbet, sherbet and sugar free," Greg said.

The Hop offers various discounts, including 10 percent off if patrons bring in their own container.

"Save resources, since we unfortunately have to use disposables," he said. "We also offer 10 percent off to all UNCA and North Carolina Center for Creative Retirement staff, faculty and students everyday."

The café also provides an additional 20 percent off every Thursday for Bulldog Day and 10 percent off if patrons eat at Urban Burrito.

"The liberal arts education we received from UNCA has prepared us for the small business community with an open mind and the ability to communicate comfortably," the owners said. "We love interaction, talking to people and making them happy with our ice cream."

Students say convenience is one of their favorite things about The Hop.

"I live in Pinnacle Ridge, so I can take a two minute walk and I'm there," Metz said. "I love that I can get great ice cream that's really close."

Obesity remains an issue in U.S.

By Ryan Burner

STAFF WRITER
RRBURTNE@UNCA.EDU

Obese Americans continue to indulge in fast food at not only their expense, but that of the fast food industry, according to local health officials.

"Blaming fast food companies is an excuse for poor choices," said Jill Moffitt, director of campus recreation at UNC Asheville.

People need to start taking responsibility for their actions, instead of blaming others, Moffitt said.

In order to reduce the number of obesity lawsuits, Congress passed the Cheeseburger Bill in October 2005, according to Project Vote Smart. The bill prohibits lawsuits against anyone engaged in the food industry on claims that the food caused obesity or weight gain to the plaintiff.

Moffitt said this won't last long.

"I think most people who are serious with going forward with a lawsuit against fast food companies regarding their obesity are going to look for loopholes," Moffitt said. "Legislature will help, but most times legislature creates unintended consequences that we can't foresee."

Such acts should make the fast food industry re-examine their practices, she said.

"The message for fast food companies is, 'Maybe we should care about how we make our food,'" Moffitt said. "Not that it's their fault. I don't believe that one bit."

She said children are often victims of their parents' poor nutrition choices. This creates future plaintiffs for future obesity cases, she said.

"When we talk about children and their parents being sort of the people that are making these decisions for them, it's really easy to go there and say, 'What were those parents thinking?'" Moffitt said. "There's so many issues that are involved with those kinds of decisions. I think each unique case is very reliant on the individual."