



Artisanal ice cream
makers individualize
America's favorite dessert

By Louis Guida / Photos by David Coyle

In the local food and artisan proprietor movements that have been sweeping the nation for at least two decades, Lexington and the Bluegrass haven't been left behind. From the wild ramps, Vinson Watts tomatoes, and Berkshire pork found in farmers' markets, specialty groceries, and restaurants to the brew pubs, bourbon distilleries, wine bars, and coffeehouses sprouting from nearly every corner, the transformation here is well underway.

Maybe a little late, ice cream, America's reliably favorite dessert, has joined the insurgency. Yes, the usual trendy-to-pedestrian ice creams and sorbets remain ubiquitously available in the region. But alongside them, some locally handcrafted premium brands from owner-operated shops have been gaining notice and making an impact on palates and the market.



across the street became available. "I would sit outside my place and think, 'What would work there?'" Savane said. After consulting his family (wife, son, and two daughters), he decided on an ice cream shop and rented the space. His son, Bangaly, came up with the name Sav's Chill and began managing the shop while attending commercial flight school at Blue Grass Airport in Lexington.

After opening, Sav's Chill carried 24 flavors of Valentine's. But in early 2015 its arrangement with the Winchester company ended, Savane said, after its owner, Scott Berryman, left for an ice cream start-up in South Carolina and closed Valentine's. Savane bought Valentine's production equipment, and Bangaly, who still manages Sav's Chill, soon learned the ice cream process.

Sav's Chill makes about 100 gallons of ice cream, gelato, sorbet, and frozen yogurt a week for its shop, mobile trailer, and four Lexington restaurants. Its dairy base is from a London, Kentucky, supplier, and it uses other local ingredients when available. Bourbon ball and Kentucky coffee ice creams are its most popular flavors. The business, which has on average about five employees, is "doing very, very well," Savane said.

Mamadou "Sav" Savane and his son and general manager, Bangaly, have a hit in Sav's Chill, which produces about 100 gallons of frozen confection a week.



Freshly made bourbon ball ice cream is a customer favorite.

Sav's Chill

289 S. Limestone
Lexington, Ky 40508
859-255-2445
Open daily

Owned by popular local restaurateur Mamadou "Sav" Savane, Sav's Chill is an ice cream and frozen dessert offshoot of Sav's Grill. The businesses — Chill and Grill — anchor diagonal corners of Limestone and Maxwell streets between the University of Kentucky and downtown Lexington.

Savane, a native of Guinea in West Africa, moved to Lexington in 1993, when he married his wife, Rachel — they'd met a few years earlier while she was a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea.

After working for UPS and the Hyatt Regency, Savane pursued a passion for food and in 2008 opened Sav's Grill & West African Cuisine, a restaurant featuring traditional dishes he'd learned from his mother and sisters.

Sav's Grill had a large freezer, and Savane arranged to carry Valentine's, a Winchester-based premium Kentucky ice cream, as a dessert option for customers after their lamb stew or goat in peanut broth over rice.

In 2012, with his business doing well, space in a building

ICE CREAM'S ANCIENT ORIGINS

Ice cream has been around since Nero was eating it while Rome burned. Well, maybe, because it's not certain what the evil emperor did amid the fire, and ice cream as we now know it didn't exist 2,100 years ago. But frozen desserts did, and it's said Nero sent slaves to nearby mountains to harvest snow, which was stored in straw-covered pits, then flavored in his court with fruits and juices.

The history of ice cream is sparse — this was food, after all, not war or politics — and often mythic, but besides Nero, King Solomon and Alexander the Great enjoyed flavored ices. So too

Tang emperors; medieval Arabs (the word sherbet traces to the Arabic *sharba*); Marco Polo; and Catherine de Medici and assorted European royals.

In the late 17th century Antonio Latini, an Italian, published recipes for two frozen-fruited ices or sorbetti: a sugar one and a milk-based one that culinary historians consider the first actual ice cream. In the same period, in 1686, Francesco Procopio dei Coltelli, a Sicilian, opened Il Procope, Paris' first café, and introduced a gelato there.

In America, Washington, Jeffer-

son (who created a vanilla recipe), Madison, and Lincoln ate ice cream. As in the rest of the world, it was mostly an exotic dessert for the elite until around the mid 1800s. Then, with advances in steam and electric power, refrigeration, homogenization, packing machines, and more, its production increased. By the late 1800s it was widely available and popular. And it soon became a cultural touchstone — American as apple pie — and even, in Wallace Stevens' celebrated poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream," a metaphor for life and death.

Almost 900 million gallons of ice cream (including gelato) are produced each year now in the United



RON SUMMERS/ISTOCK

States, and Americans consume about 5.5 gallons of it per capita. About 67 percent of ice creams are marketed regionally and 16 percent of them nationally. (In 2014 global ice cream sales reached \$50 billion, and China surpassed the United States for the first time as the leading market.)



Catherine de' Medici was an early fan of flavored ices.

getting the scoop



219 S. Limestone
Lexington, Ky 40507
859-797-0085
Open Tuesday–Sunday

Lexington's only stand-alone gelateria, La Sorella is owned by sisters Selma Sulejmanagic and Alma Kajtazovic, who with their parents came to Kentucky as refugees from Bosnia in 1995.

Sulejmanagic, who attended Lexington public schools and has a degree in psychology from the University of Kentucky, operates La Sorella — her title is “gelatiere.” Kajtazovic (her married surname) has an MBA from Eastern Kentucky University and works as finance and operations director for LexArts in Lexington. She isn't involved day-to-day in La Sorella.

“My sister and I wanted to go into business together,” Sulejmanagic said. “A restaurant was too much. We're from Europe, and gelato was our favorite ice cream. We needed it in Lexington. So we decided on this.” They opened La Sorella (Italian for “the sister”) in a historic North Limestone Street building last December.

To prepare for La Sorella, Sulejmanagic went to Cervignano del Friuli, a town in northeastern Italy near Trieste and the Croatian border, where she had been several times to visit a close friend. (She speaks some Italian.) She spent last February apprenticing at a Cervignano gelateria. “I got recipes, and I learned everything about the business.”

Gelato is meant to be eaten fresh, and Sulejmanagic tries to make hers daily. She usually offers six flavors of it — with a base that's about 90 percent milk and 10 percent cream — and six flavors of sorbetto. Her ingredients are



natural and, when possible, local. Her production equipment is Italian. She makes about 50 gallons of gelato and sorbetto each week. Her most popular flavors are gelati: whipped cream and pistachio and, for her youngest customers, cookies and cream.

Sisters Alma Kajtazovic and Selma Sulejmanagic (right) take pride in the authenticity of the gelato they make and sell at La Sorella.

As a six-month-old business, La Sorella is doing well, Sulejmanagic said. “We're growing every day. And we haven't hit peak season, summer, yet.”



Ice cream and gelato are each made with a base of milk, cream, and sugar (eggs are optional), but gelato has a higher — often much higher — milk-to-cream ratio, making it less fat. Gelato also has less air churned into it, making it denser and creamier, and it's served 10 to 15 degrees warmer. Sorbets (*sorbetti* in Italian) are made mainly from only fruit and sugar and contain no dairy. Sherbets are similar, but contain some dairy.



Toa Green offers specialty ice creams and sorbets as well as old-fashioned standards such as root beer floats at Crank & Boom Ice Cream Lounge.

Crank & Boom

1210 Manchester St.
Lexington, Ky 40504
859-288-2176
Open daily

The largest and highest-profile handcrafted ice cream business here, Crank & Boom, is an only-in-America story of entrepreneurship and communalism.

Like Sav's Chill, it originated as a dessert option in a restaurant — owner Toa Green's Thai Orchid Cafe on South Broadway near the University of Kentucky in Lexington.

Green — her given name was Vipavee Toa Veerasethakul — was born in Kentucky. Her father, Kat, and mother, Suda, emigrated from Thailand to attend Kentucky graduate schools and opened Smile of Siam restaurant in Frankfort in 1990.

Green grew up working in her parents' restaurant. After graduating from the University of North Carolina with a journalism and mass communications degree in 2004, she was marketing coordinator for Habitat for Humanity in Lexington, spent three months with Habitat tsunami relief in India and Thailand, worked for a caterer and as a freelance web designer — all before she opened Thai Orchid Cafe with her parents' help in 2006.

Thai Orchid did well, and in 2011 Green and her husband, Mike Green, whom she married in 2008, purchased it from her parents. Not long after that, she

bought a two-quart Cuisinart ice cream machine on Amazon and began making a Thai-inspired coconut ice cream. It proved popular, and she soon added more flavors. In 2012, what she thought might be an interesting side business took off. "The turning point came when customers started coming in and asking about our ice cream," she said. In 2013 she bought commercial equipment and created Crank & Boom, named in a round-about-way after a college roommate.

Crank & Boom grew. In June 2015 Green opened Crank & Boom's brick-and-mortar shop (which includes a sundae bar and beer, wine, and cocktail service) on Manchester Street in Lexington's Distillery District. Last December she sold Thai Orchid Cafe.

Since its Manchester Street opening Crank & Boom has prospered, with sales of 200 gallons of ice cream and sorbet a week (made at a separate facility in Lexington); steady lines of customers; a core of 20 employees that grows to 35 seasonally; placement in local markets, including Whole Foods, Kroger, and Lucky's; and plans for regional and national expansions. (Crank & Boom will open a second Lexington location next year at The Summit at Fritz Farm, a new, upscale mixed-use center.) Green is president and owner of the company and its "chief happiness officer." Mike Green is CFO.

Its bottom line aside, Crank & Boom is a business with a purpose. "Can we use ice cream for positive change?" said Green. "That's our main goal." The company achieves that in several ways, she added. It has a "positive, inspiring" work environment, and employees make a "fair living wage." It hosts and sponsors numerous community events. Its shop's second floor can be booked for occasions like baby and bridal showers and corporate meetings (and has an alcove for Crank & Boom selfies). "We're a place for the community to hang out," said Green, "a place where people can create memories."

Crank & Boom's price — \$8 a pint — reflects "the economics of positive change," Green said. Its ice creams and sorbets are natural and made with local ingredients when possible. (Its dairy mix is from a Russellville, Kentucky, supplier, and Crank & Boom purchased so much of it last year, Green said, that it caused a state-wide cream shortage and "boosted the local economy.") The top seller is bourbon and honey ice cream, and Kentucky blackberry and buttermilk is a popular signature flavor. **KM**