

Metro Detroit couple's ice pop dream not on ice anymore

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Detroit— Hildie Haviland is like a lot of home chefs for whom necessity is the mother of invention. She started making her own ice pops when her lactose intolerance made ice cream and other desserts off limits.

Add in a helping of creativity, a supportive husband and a marketing degree, and Haviland realized she had an idea for a business.

This summer, she and husband Bryan started Detroit Pop Shop and began selling her signature treats around Metro Detroit. At first, they thought they would supply a limited run of their handcrafted gourmet ice pops at store openings, farmer's markets and the like.

The marketplace had other plans. These tasty pops — in a rainbow of flavors from Faygo Red Pop Float to Grapefruit Habanero to Oreo Cookies and Cream — have found a new home.

This weekend, Mootown Creamery in Eastern Market will begin offering the Havilands' pops as a regular menu item. This next phase of success has the couple dreaming big. Now, Haviland said they hope to some day have other permanent sites like in Comerica Park or distribution to major grocery stores.

"It's much more than we ever thought would happen. We wanted an ice-pop cart at the farmer's market. Now, it's moved into areas that we didn't even consider," Haviland said. "We see big avenues for growth — can't you see gourmet ice pops in every gas station? The sky's the limit."

The rise of high-end ice pops around Detroit is a mix of foodie obsession and a backlash against food additives, plus growing awareness of food allergies.

Metro Detroit has several companies vying for domination, including Detroit Pop Shop, Alegria Pops Detroit and Detroit Lix.

These startups are hustling to gain name recognition and a local following. It is part of a larger dessert renaissance, as cupcake joints including Just Baked and unique ice cream shops such as Treat Dreams continue to expand.

Industry experts say gourmet ice pops have a relatively robust future. Consumers are spending more money on frozen yogurt than ice cream these days, mostly for the health benefits and to avoid additional sugar in their diets. For example, research firm IBISWorld estimates revenues at frozen-yogurt shops will grow at an annualized rate of 6.7 percent, to \$2.1 billion by the end of 2018.

Phil Lempert, who is known as the Supermarket Guru, has studied the food industry, retail fads and consumer behavior for decades. He says trends such as organic foods and "light" sugars will continue well into the future, making products such as those from the Detroit Pop Shop a winner.

"Ingredients are key, especially for the millennial generation," Lempert said. "Every year, about 15,000 new products are introduced into grocery stores; only about 1,200 make it. ... It's not about the money, it's about the person, their insights and their understanding of consumer trends."

Vendors have turned into Detroit Pop Shop fans. Jess McClary is a co-owner of McClary Brothers, which creates drinkable vinegars and Shrub Sodas. McClary met Haviland after she tagged one of their blackberry vinegars on Instagram.

Now, the two companies work together: Haviland uses McClary pineapple products in her ice pops and McClary shares her knowledge of the Detroit-area food landscape.

"I have never seen anybody with so much drive like Hildie. She's never misses an opportunity," McClary said. "She understands that the sales window is shorter because it's a largely seasonal product. She hits every single mark as fast as she can. She's got incredible hustle."

Detroit Pop Shop also sells “Boozicles,” popular ice pops with alcohol for the 21-and-up crowd.

The Havilands say they didn’t set out to become ice-pop millionaires. Their mission, Hildie Haviland said, is simple: to share happiness throughout Metro Detroit, one pop at a time. Eventually, she could see quitting her day job in marketing to run Detroit Pop Shop full time.

For now, they are content to share their wares with local celebrities thanks to a partnership with Live Nation. They recently served their icy treats to country music stars and members of musician Jack White’s entourage. Their regular hot spots include Detroit mainstays City Bird, Parker Street Market, Eastern Market and the Northwest Detroit Farmers’ Market in Grandmont Rosedale Park. They also are available at The Rustbelt Market in Ferndale.

Haviland believes the Detroit brand has staying power, and the 29-year-old Michigan State University grad says she is devoted to working all of her spare hours on her ice-pop dream.

“We want to be true to who we are — and that’s part of Michigan and Detroit,” Haviland said. “At a certain point, there’s an intrinsic value of staying small enough to remain quality and be connected to your customers. ... I could not be more grateful.”