

Ritter's Frozen Custard to expand by 30 outlets

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JAN UNDERWOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Beth Rogers builds a strawberry sundae at the Ritter's Frozen Custard franchise store she owns with her husband Kyle Rogers on Dayton-Xenia Road in Beavercreek. Staff photo by Jan Underwood

By Tim Tresslar, Staff Writer 4:13 PM Saturday, May 21, 2011

BEAVERCREEK — Beth Rogers says she and her husband, Kyle, loved treats from Ritter's Frozen Custard — loved them enough to sell them.

The couple, who previously worked as youth ministers, bought the 2531 Dayton-Xenia Road store in April of last year from another franchisee, Rogers said.

In the coming years, TruFoods LLC, parent of Ritter's Frozen Custard, will want to enlist others such as the Rogers as the company expands operations in Dayton and other major Ohio cities.

Gary Occhiogrosso, chief development officer for TruFoods, said plans call for the company to add up to five Ritter's stores in the Dayton area over the next several years.

"Franchisees are a very important piece of the expansion equation," he said.

In addition to the Rogers' store in Beavercreek, another franchisee operates a Ritter's store at 2226 Wilmington Pike, Kettering. A third Ritter's store is located in Toledo.

TruFoods hopes to add up to 30 stores across the state over the next four to six years, Occhiogrosso said.

TruFoods' roster also includes Wall Street Deli, Pudgie's Famous Chicken, and Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips. The company has 100 locations and \$40 million in sales.

TruFoods acquired Ritter's in 2008 and has retooled aspects of it to position the brand for growth, Occhiogrosso said.

"As a system, it was only able to grow to a certain number of units, a certain number of shops, because the franchising piece wasn't as good as the product," he said.

One of the issues, he said, was Ritter's had a single store design — a circular building that sat on a half-acre with no interior seating. The original store layout limited the brand's

ability to grow, since it couldn't be used in such places as airports, shopping centers or college campuses, he said. TruFoods has added other designs to fix the problem, he said. Beth Rogers said scheduling employees and buying inventory were new tasks for her. But other aspects of the job came easily.

For example, the couple was used to interacting with high school and college students and most of their employees fall into that age bracket.

In addition, the franchise's former owner and Ritter's also provided training, advice and a system for running the business, she said.