



<http://www.news-journalonline.com/business/local-business/2012/08/26/port-orange-frozen-custard-shop-earns-its-just-desserts.html>

Getting the job done: Port Orange frozen custard shop earns its just desserts

BY BOB KOSLOW, BUSINESS WRITER

_August 26, 2012 12:05 AM

Posted in:

- [Ritter's Frozen Custard](#)

BUSINESS KEYS TO SUCCESS

PORT ORANGE -- Thirteen years ago, John Dame and his wife Rene Dame opened Ritter's Frozen Custard shop here at the corner of Clyde Morris Boulevard and Herbert Street.

Since then, the round blue-and-white custard and ice cream shop has become a city institution for residents seeking a cool treat on a hot day or a nightly dessert. The colorful menus posted at the walk-up shop also lists smoothies, Italian ice, Hawaiian shaved ice, cones, sundaes, shakes and malts. The shop also offers cakes and pies, along with hot dogs and baked fries.

The owners are also known for their commitment to help schools, churches and other community organizations raise money. The business also sponsors youth and adult sports teams and leagues.

John Dame, at age 62, is a U.S. Air Force veteran of 6 1/2 years and worked for McDonald's for 23 years, including 15 years in the East Volusia area helping run and grow franchise restaurants once owned by Ray and Mike Eddy.

In 1998, John Dame was looking for a business opportunity on his own.

Why Ritter's Frozen Custard?

The product quality is what drew my attention the most. Having worked for McDonald's, that was important. Besides, the white building looked like it would be easy to keep clean.

How did you get started?

I was in Indianapolis in October 1998 visiting an Air Force friend and he told me about the new Ritter's that had just opened in Greenville, Ind. We went to visit on a day where it was like 30 degrees. Each of the store's three windows had 10 people on line. I said if it could do that in this weather, it would do well in Florida. I was looking for a business at the time and so we pursued a franchise. We were lucky to get to lease this corner. We've been very pleased and it's been so rewarding.

What lessons did you learn in the Air Force and with McDonald's that have helped you open and run a successful business?

Structure and discipline. Both are very structured, top to bottom. Consistency too. With structure, it's having check lists and everybody following procedures, those were in both too. McDonald's also has a very good training program. Discipline is following rules and following plans. Have a good business plan and follow it. Knowing when to change and make adjustments just comes with experience.

I see you have joined the latest craze with a Ritter's food truck?

We've had this old bakery truck for five years, but just this summer converted it to a food truck. We're serving nearly everything we have at the shop. We call it our "Mobile Scoop Shop" and are getting some T-shirts made up that say that. We've done about five events so far and have more scheduled. It's a way to expand the business, but also to help people with fundraising. We've done "School Night Out" where we donate a percent from a night's sale to a school, but not everyone can get to the shop that night. Sometimes it's easier if we go to an event where you have a collective audience.

Why are you so committed to assisting community organizations?

We help out some teams with jerseys, contribute to the Port Orange recreation department and help some teams allow them to do car washes at the shop to raise money. My wife and I feel it's part of our ministry to help other people. We try and help our church, Cross Roads. When I was at McDonald's, it was one of their emphasis to help your community. We just carry it on from there.

At one point in 2004 and 2005 you were looking to expand into Ormond Beach. What happened?

Yeah, we had a lot of interest from people in Ormond and we tried, but it just didn't work out. It was right as the economy was tanking. We still want to. But right now we are focused on the truck operations. Maybe we can get the truck up there and go every weekend so people know we are there and grow the business that way.

Are you into social media marketing?

We are Port Orange Ritter's on Facebook. We add information about sales and events on there like Dogs Night Out in October where dogs are brought to the shop in costumes and dogs get free ice cream. We have loyalty club members who get email coupons each month and other benefits. We have more than 2,000 friends; it's the highest number of all the 28 Ritter's nationwide.