

It's Called Custard... thank you very much

Shakespeare taught us that a rose, by any other name, would still smell sweet, right? Well, the same goes for the creamy, frozen goodness we so generalize as ice cream. But it's not all ice cream, per se. Some of it is sherbet ... some of it is frozen yogurt ... some of it is custard. In the Midwest **Ritter's Frozen Custard** might be the most well-known proprietor of the custard craze. But did you know this national company originated right in Johnson County? The first Ritter's shop was founded in Franklin in 1989.

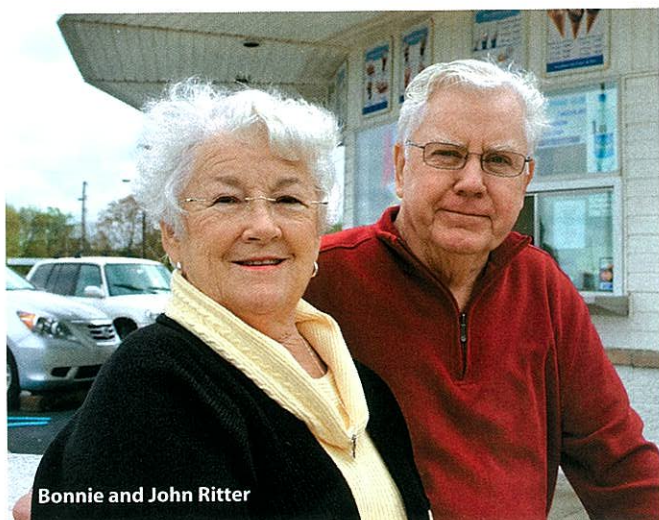
We caught up with John and Bonnie Ritter, the founders of this sinfully sweet, cool treat business for a little custard Q&A:

How did the concept for Ritter's develop?

JOHN: Custard was popular in the '50s. The younger generation still isn't familiar with custard. Early on in the business, I was serving a mom and her son. The little boy said he didn't want to try "that stuff." I asked him if he wanted to try "ice cream." and he, of course, said yes. We asked him if he liked it. He said he did, but he still didn't want to try the "other stuff." After that, we started calling it ice cream. The Ritter's business started with about five years' research looking for the best ice cream — especially researching in Wisconsin where there is a lot of good custard. We developed our own formula, which is still freshly made from scratch in each store and ideally served within two hours. Lemon was the standard flavor of the '50s, so we still serve lemon custard every Wednesday at our Franklin and Greenwood stores.

So, what's the big difference between custard and ice cream?

JOHN: Custard really is just a denser ice cream. Less air, more solid, more egg yolks.



Bonnie and John Ritter



Natalie Rairdon serves freshly made custard.

How and why did you choose Franklin as the founding location?

JOHN: We actually started off looking in Bloomington and then Greenwood, but felt Franklin had the best demographics. Franklin has been really good to us, and we have never regretted starting here. We feel very supported by the community and the college. In turn, we hope the community feels supported by Ritter's.

What are some little-known facts about the business start-up and those first few years?

JOHN: Early on, I attended a two-week ice cream course at Penn State.

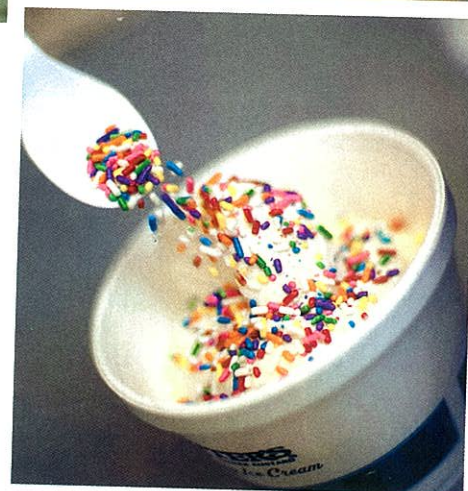
BONNIE: Was there a diploma?

JOHN: I don't remember, but there was a shirt. I showed the instructor the formula we had developed. He said it was a sure thing. That gave us a lot of encouragement.

Side note: Penn State's Ice Cream Short Course is the oldest, best-known and largest educational program dealing with the science and technology of ice cream. It also is believed to be the first continuing education course in the United States.

What was the best part of starting the business?

JOHN: Coming from a film background and animation, the most fun was developing the look and the building. We both love that it is a family-oriented business. We have great satisfaction in seeing the patio tables full of families. And for the most part, people are happy when eating ice cream.





Spencer Bockover finishes off a sundae.

What was the toughest part?

JOHN: I had been dreaming this up since high school. I had always wanted to have searchlights at the grand opening. During the opening weekend in Franklin, we had searchlights and a big open house planned, but it downpoured all weekend. It was a huge disappointment.

Another side note: For the first five years of the business, the Ritters worked in the shop from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day. Bonnie still pops into the Franklin store at least once a week. You might even see her scraping gum off the sidewalks.

Lastly and most important, what are your favorite flavors?

JOHN: They're all good, but some are better than others. I really like the banana. It is made with fresh bananas. We had tried several artificial flavors, but none of them tasted right. I had assumed that fresh banana would turn brown, but it didn't.

BONNIE: Vanilla with butterscotch syrup and nuts. I like the salty and sweet. Although, I've had many favorites, including chocolate with marshmallows and chocolate with Heath Bars.

Other side notes: Today, Ritter's Frozen Custard is owned by Trufoods, LLC; however, John and Bonnie still own the Franklin and Greenwood shops. They developed the first 80 flavors themselves. Since then, managers and franchise owners have helped come up with a lot of the ideas.

In general, the favorite right now is turtle. Before that it was butter pecan.

The Franklin shop is 21 years old, and its general manager (who also manages the Greenwood shop) started there right before he turned 15 and has been with the company for 20 years.

Ritter's Frozen Custard, 351 N. Morton Franklin. 317-738-9010 www.ritters.com.

Making your own ice cream can be a fun family activity, and the process is relatively easy.

Homemade vanilla ice cream

Here's what you'll need:
(YIELDS EIGHT HALF-CUP SERVINGS)

An ice cream maker (available at most home retailers)

- 1 cup whole milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1 cup whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt

In a medium saucepan, whisk together milk, sugar, egg yolks and salt. Place pan over medium-high heat and whisk until mixture reaches a simmer.

Lower heat to medium and whisk for five minutes or until mixture begins to thicken. Strain mixture into a large bowl, then whisk in half-and-half, cream and vanilla. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, about two hours.

Pour mixture into ice cream maker; process according to manufacturer's instructions.

Spiked cream? For an adult-only option, try these easy and surprisingly low-calorie toppings:

Fresh strawberry sauce

- 1 cup trimmed and chopped strawberries
- 2 tablespoons sugar substitute, such as Stevia
- 1 teaspoon orange liqueur

Combine all of the ingredients in a medium bowl. Mash the strawberries until the sauce is mostly smooth. Let stand about 10 minutes before serving.

Maple walnut sauce

- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon rum
- 2 tablespoons chopped, toasted walnuts

Combine the ingredients and simmer until reduced by half. Stir in walnuts and serve warm.

Sometimes, vanilla just isn't enough. Want to spice up this time-tested recipe? For the popular favorite mint chocolate chip, substitute peppermint extract for vanilla and add mini chocolate chips after the cream mixture has frozen. How about peanut butter? After straining the mixture in Step 1 (above), stir in smooth peanut butter and mix through, then continue the rest of the steps.