

## COMMENTARY

# Happiest jobs in town, from Port Charlotte to Nokomis

When Netherlander Sharon Hooijkaas — co-owner of award-winning Punta Gorda ice cream parlor Zoet Sweet Boutique — first learned that July was America's National Ice Cream Month, she smiled sweetly and deadpanned, "I thought every month was ice cream month."

To borrow a quote often mis-attributed to Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel: Don't cry that we've lost Cubby's, Irving's and Nokomis Groves. Smile that we've got two new creameries, and more.

## HOWARD'S HERSHEY'S

Howard Freudenvoll, owner of Charlotte Harbor's alliterative new Howard's Hershey's Ice Cream, couldn't have had a better surname.

His family name means "joyful" — exactly what you'd expect an ice cream purveyor to be.

He's even happier now that his cheerful little parlor has two dedicated parking spaces in the overflowing Pioneers Pizza parking lot. And a cone or a cup is just the thing after pizza.

Don't assume his product isn't as good as homemade just because it carries a brand name.

Hershey's Ice Cream — founded in the same year, in the same Pennsylvania town, is totally unrelated to the chocolate empire of the same name.

It's been churning out fresh ice cream since 1894, when five Hershey brothers started making it in their farmhouse, packing it in metal-lined wooden containers that they designed and built themselves.

Today, Freudenvoll offers 44 of their fresh, hand-dipped flavors at a time.

Choices rotate in daily off a roster of 110 crazy possibilities like Banana Pudding, Midnight Peanut Butter Marshmallow, Salty Caramel Bananas Foster, even Blue Moon, that secret Michigan concoction that's dyed the tongues of generations of Midwest kids. Dairy-free vegans can choose chocolate or vanilla "Oatmazing" oat-milk flavors.

"We can make anything people want," said counter man Jacob Bartlett, flashing the signature happy grin worn by all ice cream scoopers.

"I've been a cook at Sweet's Diner, Hometown Grill and the Nav-A-Gator," he said. "Here, nothing ever gets sent back to me!"

Howard's also sells home-baked cookies, brownies and The Licorice Guy's homemade cinnamon, red, black, blue raspberry, green apple and, in summer, watermelon licorice.

**Howard's Hershey's Ice Cream** (\$), 941-889-7789, 4560 Tamiami Trail, Charlotte Harbor (next to Pioneers Pizza), is open daily, noon to 9 p.m.

## CAPTAIN'S CREAMERY

In the unlikely event you hit both creameries the same day, you might do a double-take.



SUE WADE  
The Scene

"How did you get over here so fast?" you might ask.

Cheerful new owner Bryan Hathaway, at Captain's Creamery in Port Charlotte, could be Bartlett's twin. These have to be the two happiest guys in town.

Beaming with joy, eyes sparkling, Hathaway has loved feeding people ice cream since his first soda jerk job at 16.

He has a captain's license (thus the store name), but his calling was creamery.

Hathaway, fiancée Cassidy Clafin, and countless curious Peachland Promenade visitors have had to wait over a year, but the 20-seat shop is finally open, serving 39 handmade flavors and one more for pups.

Among them are Hathaway's own creations: Grumpie's (or Grampa's), a nod to his fiancée's dad's favorite mix of chocolate and Whoopers malted milk balls, and The Hangry Captain, a caramel, chocolate and peanut combo thrown together while Hathaway was sweating the opening one morning at 3 a.m.

**Captain's Creamery** (\$), 941-249-4367, 24123 Peachland Boulevard (three doors right of Fin Sushi in Peachland Promenade), Port Charlotte, is open daily, noon to 9:30 p.m.

## 'WICHES

You don't have to sling ice cream to have fun running an eatery.

Newlyweds Alissa Marcolongo and Mark Warren of Venice devised a brilliant, stress-free concept with just the two of them as employees. And their place perfectly fills a beachside grab-and-go 'wich niche.

Month-old 'Wiches in Nokomis — a 750-square-foot, rainbow-hued 1970s tribute, with a lone picnic table on a patch of AstroTurf and a couple of seats outside — is grab-and-go maximized.

Its marketing campaign, slick as a mega-chain's, is former Delaware VP Marcolongo's work.

Daily Facebook posts, trivia contests, tie-dye "silly cups," colorful rolled-up T-shirts, stickers and a personalized postcard straight out of FloridaLand, even the 'Wiches name, spring from her fertile imagination.

Mark built the interior and spun it full of memories: a rotary wall phone, toys, lunchboxes and a Polaroid camera from his childhood.

"We wanted people to smile when they walk in the door," Marcolongo said. "I know we do!"



SUN PHOTO BY SUE WADE

## Captain's Creamery ice cream has 40 flavors to fill all kinds of cones and cups.

Every morning, they prepare an old-fashioned, lunch-box-ready menu of fresh-made, plump, wrapped sammies — thin-sliced ham, turkey, bologna, roast beef and veggie (slathered with avocado-lemon spread and hummus), layered with classic Kraft American, pickles, mayo, ground black pepper and yellow mustard, on Wonder white or rye, Nature's Own wheat, Philadelphia-made Kaiser roll, or gluten-free.

But let's talk outside the lunchbox for a minute.

These 'wiches' flavor ends up being pure essence of Cuban. Their Farmland bologna alone — thin-sliced and silken — is nothing like the rind-ringed rounds that Mom used to give you.

And the little 'wichery doesn't make just sandwiches and chewy homemade cookies.

Its killer secret, flying out the door these days, is Grammy's Hoagie Dip, a deconstructed Italian hoagie that Marcolongo's mom used to whip up for teen parties.

"I can't tell you all the secret spices," she said. "But it has chopped pepperoni, salami, ham, provolone, tomatoes, red onion and banana peppers mixed with mayo. We serve it in a little tub for dipping, with a Kaiser roll, or as a sandwich."

Bag 'WICH lunches include snacks like hot-boiled peanuts or chips and a drink, along with a square of Bazooka bubble gum, Bazooka Joe comic included. 'Wiches also does a four-person picnic-size Pic 'WICH and will cater any size gathering.

**'Wiches** (\$, O), 941-303-6111, 303 Tamiami Trail South, Nokomis (4 Bays Center), is open Monday to Thursday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Friday and Saturday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Send restaurant and bar news and recommendations to columnist Sue Wade at [suewade47@aol.com](mailto:suewade47@aol.com).

Average price ranges are \$ = inexpensive (under \$10), \$\$ = moderate (\$11-\$30), and \$\$\$ = pricey (over \$30), including tip and beverage. O = outdoor seating available.



SUN PHOTO BY SUE WADE

## Howard's Hershey's counter man Jacob Bartlett holds a cupful of past flavor labels.



PHOTO PROVIDED

## 'Wiches turkey sandwiches, here on Kaiser roll and rye, are packed with thin-sliced meat, pickle, American cheese, yellow mustard and mayo.



SUN PHOTO BY SUE WADE

## Mark Warren and Alissa Marcolongo run 'Wiches as a fun and simple grab-and-go with 1970s flair.