



KICKSTARTING IT UP A NOTCH

Red Wagon Creamery tries a novel funding model BY SHANNON FINNELL

As failures go, this one was pretty successful. Red Wagon Creamery co-owner Emily Phillips says she knew that the ice cream cart probably wouldn't be able to raise \$13,000 using the crowd-funding website Kickstarter, but she didn't realize the small, less than one-year-old company would make it to more than \$3,000, either.

"It was a lot of fun," Phillips says, partially because the Kickstarter project let her see many of the donations shared on social media sites, and she says she takes a lot of pride in how many people were excited enough to see the business grow that they'd donate their own money.

Red Wagon's ice cream flavors range from the conventional to the surprising. The Smoked Salt Caramel No. 6 is a standby that sells out quite often. It's a rich, strongly flavored caramel that confuses the mouth — is this really ice cream you're eating? Because it tastes like sea salt caramel candy, and it's bold and delicious. Phillips says that she usually makes twice as much of it as any other flavor.

Frozen Goat is another favorite, and it's made with Wandering Goat's Café Femenino coffee. Red Wagon's Mint Chocolate Chip uses real mint that's local and organic, plus vegan chocolate. And there's always a sorbet on-hand, so bringing your favorite vegan is encouraged.

Other popular flavors include Phillips' attempts to work her way around the cheese wheel, with flavors like gouda and walnut or goat cheese with roasted pine nuts, rosemary and Blue Dog Meade swirled through. "It's nice to be able to highlight local products like Blue Dog Meade and local goat farms," Phillips says.

One notable Kickstarter donation came from Humphry Slocombe Ice Cream in San Francisco. "For them to notice us was great," Phillips says. "They're sort of the rock stars of ice cream."

Phillips and her husband, Stuart, envisioned using the Kickstarter money to buy a more efficient ice cream machine that would allow them to make more ice cream at a faster rate, cutting down the risk of ice crystals in the process. They had also hoped to buy an ice cream tricycle for selling ice cream on the go and a shed that would enable them to store the cart at Healthy Pet (also home to the gloriously tasty Party Cart) instead of taking it home every night.

No worries, though, ice cream fans. Since they weren't counting on the Kickstarter money, Phillips says Red Wagon will use other methods of creative fundraising to continue to grow. The latest news is that the custom-designed trike (made by Springfield company Wheelburro) is in the works and will debut in late May.

The Phillipses are devising a way to acquire the faster ice cream machinery, too. With all the days they've sold out of ice cream this year, they'll need it. Summer's coming.

With all this talk of funding, there is the larger question: How can a small, artisan ice cream cart survive the winter in Eugene's rainy, not-exactly-ideal-for-ice-cream weather?

"This winter has been interesting," Phillips says, as a gust of wind catches the fold-up chair by her cart and starts to whisk it away.

Red Wagon experimented by relocating to Midtown for a bit, trying to stay warm and dry, but when dinner service ceased, the Phillipses say they realized just how much ice cream they sell at night and moved back to the Healthy Pet a little earlier than they planned.

Phillips, a professional chef even before Red Wagon, says she thinks part of the reason Red Wagon is a business that can thrive in the winter is that she makes everything from scratch, even the ice cream base. "I think that makes a big difference in the quality of the ice cream," she says.

This summer they'll diversify their locales by adding Kesey Plaza and Willamalane to the mix, along with the Healthy Pet. Plus, they just confirmed a spot at the Lane County Farmers Market on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For those Red Wagon fans who can't get by on a scoop alone, the cart sells pints, and pints are also available at eugenelocalfoods.com. They deliver, too. ■

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