

Brain Freeze

RED WAGON AFTER DARK DARES TO MIX ICE CREAM WITH ALCOHOL by Amy Schneider

From food cart to store front, Red Wagon Creamery has come a long way. The ice cream shop is well known for wonderfully eclectic, handmade ice cream flavors like carrot jalapeño, peach rosemary and Saturday Morning, meant to taste like the milk left over after a bowl of Fruit Loops. But stick around after 10 pm on Friday and Saturday, and the creamery transforms into Red Wagon After Dark, where bartender Amanda Hoffman throws booze into the mix of creamy deliciousness.

“People come in thinking about dessert but still wanting another drink, so this is the perfect solution,” says Hoffman, who has worked as a bartender for about 10 years and joined up with Red Wagon Creamery last fall. “It’s really a great opportunity to be creative.”

Amid the tumultuous hub of activity pervading downtown Eugene on a Friday night, the creamery is a pleasant place to chill out and enjoy drinks, ice cream or both at the same time. Blue sky-colored walls, cheerful lights strung along the ceiling, pews from a recently demolished church and handmade wooden tables lend a cheery atmosphere. A focus on sustainability adds a nice touch — instead of throwing away mountains of plastic tasting spoons every day, Red Wagon has a permanent stock that gets washed and reused.

“I like this location, and with us being a more family-oriented business, it’s helping draw people back to downtown,” says co-owner Stuart Phillips, who started the business with his wife Emily Phillips, a chef and the mastermind behind Red Wagon’s unique flavors. “We have people coming in who say they haven’t been in the downtown area for over 20 years.”

Emily Phillips came up with the idea of combining liquor and ice cream, and she and Stuart Phillips advertised for a bartender on Craigslist. “The ad said we were looking for ‘a creative bartender with flair, but not TGI Friday’s kind of flair,’” Stuart Phillips says. Hoffman answered their ad and was soon brainstorming ice cream cocktail ideas.

Red Wagon has been making Ninkasi and Falling Sky beer floats for years, but Hoffman expanded the menu with spiked milkshakes and specialty items like the Frozen Goat Latte, which combines Wandering Goat coffee, Kahlua, vodka and two flavors of ice cream. “It’s the ultimate trifecta,” she says.



STUART PHILLIPS
LEADS A ROUND OF
CARDS AGAINST
HUMANITY

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Another favorite is what Hoffman calls a “chocolate lover’s delight,” the Chocolate Wagon. Hoffman drizzles chocolate fudge down the sides of a glass and then adds a blended concoction of Red Wagon’s signature Heart of Chocolate ice cream, hazelnut-flavored Frangelico and Baileys for an additional touch of creaminess. Chocolate whipped cream tops it off, and one sip leaves you drowning in chocolate-y bliss.

“I had never been part of starting a bar before,” Hoffman says, “and it was really cool coming into it with a blank slate.”

Hoffman’s menu also includes non-ice-cream cocktails of her own design. The Downtown Eugene — a Manhattan for Oregonians — mixes sweet vermouth with bourbon

and replaces cherry juice with grenadine. “We also serve Jell-O shots, which I’m relatively famous for,” she says. As spring arrives and the seasonal menu changes, Hoffman says she’s looking forward to adding new berries and herbs to her repertoire. A marionberry lemon drop is in the works.

As if ice cream cocktails aren’t entertainment enough, Red Wagon After Dark features Cards Against Humanity Fridays and Bingo Saturdays, with prizes ranging from Sizzle Pie gift cards to Angry Birds fruit snacks. As Hoffman says, “We’re different from every other place you’ll find downtown.” ■

Red Wagon After Dark in Red Wagon Creamery, 55 W. Broadway, is open Friday and Saturday nights from 10 pm to midnight. Regular store hours are 2 to 10 pm Sunday through Thursday and 2 pm to midnight on Fridays and Saturdays.

Get Thee to AA

UNDERAGE DRINKING WITH UNUSUAL CONSEQUENCES by Silas Valentino

My dad approached parenting in his own way. When my older brother Taylor started wearing obscene clothing during his rebellious youth, my dad responded by wearing a brown bag over his head like a chef’s hat the next time the two of them went grocery shopping. He’s a maverick in just about every way except his fashion, so it makes sense he made me attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting after I was caught drinking during high school.

In early 2007, my friends and I got together at a house without parents and went to town on a bottle of cheap whiskey called Black Velvet. Being 14 years old, as well as a fool, I couldn’t handle the liquor and started throwing up on the driveway. They didn’t know what to do with me so they called my dad and told him I had food poisoning from

a burrito — a classic cover-up. My dad picked me up and soon noticed the scent of alcohol. When I awoke from my slumber, he had a repentance list ready, and at the bottom was “attend an AA meeting.”

I found a meeting at my local community center, and with a belly full of butterflies, I entered the room. I was hoping it would be a low-key experience, but that was not the case. It turned out to be a chip awards ceremony (a celebration in recognition of sobriety), and the room was packed. I tried to disappear in the back with the Oreos and coffee, but a generous woman spotted me and offered a seat that was at the very front of the room. Terrified and noticeably awkward, I listened to the stories, accomplishments and regrets from local townspeople.

An older gentleman gave his testimony and then earned his 30-year chip, but even after such a feat I got

the sense that he battled with his alcoholism day by day. I then recognized a friend’s parent and together we shared a tender moment of confidentiality. Strangers exchanged their problems and successes and after an hour we all held hands and chanted, “Keep coming back; it works if you work it.”

The whole experience was an echo of that scene in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* when Luke has the vision of Vader in the swamp caves of Dagobah. There’s a thin line between control and powerlessness. My dad didn’t send me to an AA meeting because he thought I had a problem — he did it so I could see what might happen if I let alcohol control my life. Eight years later, I’m at the end of my college career, a time where alcoholism has lobbied its way into the norm, and due to my childhood AA visit I’m able to appreciate the value of choice. ■