

SWEETS

With a cute storefront in the Farmers' Union Marketplace near Fifth Avenue and Olive Street in downtown Eugene, **Chocolate Decadence** provides gluten-free, dairy-free and vegan chocolate to candy lovers with dietary restrictions. Don't think this is some kind of second-class chocolate — Chocolate Decadence makes divinely tasty morsels, from its chocolate-covered coconut balls to its buzzy chocolate espresso bar. Get your chocolate fix at chocolatedecadence.com or visit the store at 152 W. 5th Avenue in Eugene.

BLISSING OUT

COCONUT BLISS BRINGS VEGAN GOODNESS TO THE ICE CREAM WORLD BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

'SUMMER BERRY SWIRL' IS MADE WITH ORGANIC STRAWBERRIES, BLUEBERRIES AND BLACKBERRIES

Local ice cream maker Coconut Bliss has built a nationally recognized brand name without sacrificing its core values of independence and integrity. Coconut Bliss marketing communications manager Elizabeth Reilly says these Eugene-style priorities are partially what make her company so unique. “We are one of the best examples of a family-run company in the region,” Reilly tells *EW*.

Coconut Bliss founders Luna Marcus and Larry Kaplowitz are themselves sensitive to dairy and soy. Prior to launching Coconut Bliss, the pair was disappointed with the ice cream alternatives on the market. “At the time, the alternatives were made out of either rice or soy,” Reilly says. “They didn’t have great flavor,” she explains, adding that instead the products were of “poor texture, they weren’t creamy. They weren’t satisfying.”

After taking some cooking classes, Marcus bought a hand-crank ice cream maker. “One day she was inspired to try coconut milk” as a base for her ice cream, Reilly recalls, “and the rest is history. We were the first product on the market to use coconut milk as a base for ice cream.”

Coconut Bliss sweetens its coconut milk with agave.

“It took off like wildfire,” Reilly adds, explaining Coconut Bliss is distributed nationwide as well as in Canada, Australia and Germany. Coconut Bliss recently launched two new flavors: “Chocolate Chip Cookie” and “Cinnamon Chocolate Fusion.”

Other flavors include “Naked Coconut,” “Salted Caramel and Chocolate” and “Vanilla Island.”

Reilly continues: “Our first customers were Red Barn and Sweet Life Patisserie. When it really started to snowball, Luna and Larry were still making it themselves. It was like, ‘OK, now we’ve got to figure out how to scale this model.’”

To deal with the added business, Junction City’s Lochmead Dairy stepped in to help with production. “Now they have a percentage ownership,” Reilly says. Nevertheless, Coconut Bliss has remained privately owned.

“We’ve never had to go through the acquisition process,” Reilly explains. “We’ve had the opportunity to maintain our philosophy and our product values.”

“Our entire product line is certified organic,” she continues. “We recently became members of the Organic Trade Association. We also support the non-GMO movement.” Reilly explains all Coconut Bliss products are vegan, gluten-, soy- and dairy-free.

“It doesn’t matter which flavor you pick up,” Reilly says. “If you have these specific dietary or lifestyle requirements — anything the customer buys is going to be OK for that.”

In addition, Coconut Bliss prioritizes sustainable business practices — the production facility is solar-powered.

The startup success story of Coconut Bliss is not uncommon in the Eugene area, particularly in the food production industry. Reilly says there’s something about Eugene that attracts and supports the entrepreneurial spirit.

“We are fortunate to live in this lush environment where food is not separate from us,” Reilly says. “This is close to us. This is personal.” ■

For more info or to find retailers, visit coconutbliss.com.

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— ELIZABETH REILLY, COCONUT BLISS