

FORK IN THE ROAD



KATHERINE RODEGHIER/PHOTOS FOR TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Employees turn out chocolates by hand at the three St. Louis-area locations of Kakao Chocolate.



Kakao Chocolate never uses artificial flavors, preservatives, coloring or sweeteners when making its chocolate confections.



Ann & Allen Baking Co. rotates the 76 flavors of Goopy Butter Cake sold at its Park Avenue Coffee shops, featuring a dozen types at a time.

Sweet St. Louis is beckoning

Goopy Butter Cake, frozen custard and chocolate await

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
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ST. LOUIS — Think of St. Louis and you think of beer and baseball. Yes, Budweiser and Anheuser-Busch dominate the beer scene, and the Cardinals the ball diamond with peanuts and hot dogs, but dig a little further and you'll find the city's sugary side.

Some of the sweet spots in St. Louis:

Goopy Butter Cake

If St. Louis had a signature dessert, this cake would be it. Like many good things, it was created by accident.

One version of the story says that in the early 1940s, baker Johnny Hoffman set out to make a cake with the firm consistency of a pound cake but that mixed up the proportions of ingredients. Another version was that his new hire mixed up the butters in the recipe, using the gooey butter intended to bind Danish pastries rather than the regular butter.

Whatever the story, Hoffman liked the result and asked his friend and fellow baker Herman Danzer to come to his German bakery in South St. Louis to help him duplicate it. They worked all day, and when Danzer's wife, Melba, stopped by, she was happy to sample, saying the cake was good but gooey. The name stuck as tightly as the cake's gooey butter.

The dessert usually has a yellow cake base topped with a layer made of eggs, cream cheese and flavorings, then is dusted with confectioner's sugar. A plate of gooey is about an inch high, can be cut in squares and usually served room temperature or warm. It can be eaten at any time of day, as a breakfast pastry, mid-day, after-dinner dessert or mid-night snack.

Ann & Allen Baking Co. makes 76 varieties of Goopy Butter Cake, which it has sold online to all 50 states. It also serves a selection at its Park Avenue Coffee shops downtown, in The Hill neighborhood and in Lafayette Square.

Decades later, on the late Melba Danzer's 91st birthday, the company invited her to come in



Chris Beckemeier demonstrates the thickness of the concretes at Ted Drewes Frozen Custard by holding one upside down.

for another sample. She declared it as good as the original and the best Goopy Butter Cake — except for her own. If that weren't enough high praise, the company's cake won top prize in Food Network's "Food Feuds."

The shops carry 12 varieties at a time, rotating through all 76. Top sellers, in addition to Mom's Traditional, are triple chocolate, turtle, red velvet and pumpkin. Seasonal varieties include eggnog and cranberry walnut.

Ann & Allen Baking Co., 888-620-8891, annandallen.com; Park Avenue Coffee, 1919 Park Ave., 314-621-4020; 417 N. 10th St., 314-231-5282; 5105 Columbia, Ave., 314-717-1900, parkavenuecoffee.com

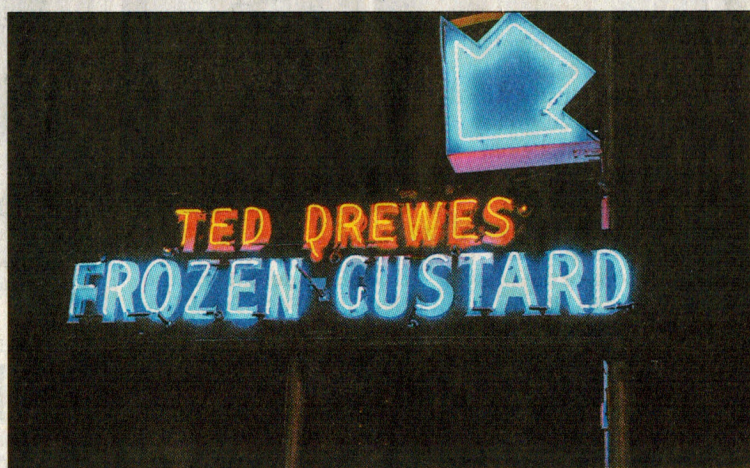
Frozen custard

Hotel concierges in St. Louis say they get this question all the time: "Where is Ted Drewes?" The frozen custard stand on

Historic Route 66 draws long lines of customers ordering cones, shakes, sundaes and its signature concretes, so named for their thickness. Chris Beckemeier, a 27-year employee, demonstrates by holding a tub of the stuff upside down. Not a drop plops out onto the real concrete at his feet. Chocolate is the most popular flavor, he said.

The line moves quickly, Beckemeier said, with most waits under 10 minutes. At peak times the stand has 37 employees taking and filling orders and sells as many as 1,400 items in a single night. Customers can call in orders for pickup, and out-of-towners with a hankering for Ted Drewes can arrange to have their order shipped in dry ice.

Ted Drewes Sr. opened his first store in Florida in 1929 and a year later came to St. Louis, selling the treats through the Depression. He'd had many offers to franchise his stands, but he, and now his



Old-fashioned neon signs draw customers to Ted Drewes Frozen Custard late into the evening on Historic Route 66.

son Ted Jr., refuse in order to maintain the quality of their product.

Ted Drewes didn't invent frozen custard; it began as a carnival treat at New York's Coney Island nearly a 100 years ago. Unlike ice cream, it contains eggs and has less air, so it stays smooth and doesn't crystallize. Drewes' secret recipe uses a particular kind of honey, which the owners go to great lengths to keep under wraps. In fact, the supplier is required to remove the labels on the honey before shipping so prying eyes can't discover the key ingredient.

The main stand on Chippewa Street on Route 66 closes Jan. 1 and reopens on Valentine's Day. At Christmas time, balsam fir trees Ted Jr. has selected in Nova Scotia are sold in the parking lot. A second stand on Grand Boulevard is open summers only.

Ted Drewes Frozen Custard, teddrewes.com; 6726 Chippewa St., 314-481-2652; 4224 S. Grand Blvd., 314-352-7376

Chocolate

"There are no Lucille Ball machines here," said Brian Pelletier, owner of Kakao Chocolate. Unlike in the classic TV episode in which Lucy frantically tries to keep up with the candy assembly line, chocolate-makers here take their time, turning out each chocolate by hand. And they don't add artificial flavors, preservatives, coloring or sweeteners. It's all-natural chocolate made in the back of the shop while you watch.

Pelletier came to the chocolate-making business in a roundabout way. "I spent 20 years in corporate America and decided I

was done with it," he said. "I wanted to do something with my hands." A friend had some chocolate-making equipment she wanted to get rid of, so he took it. "I rented this space, quit my job and learned to make chocolate."

That was in 2008. Now, in addition to his first store in St. Louis, he has two more in the suburbs. Sea Salt Caramels are the biggest sellers, but customers also crave his hand-dipped truffles in flavors such as chili pepper and lavender. His marshmallow pies are made with his own marshmallow recipe plus dark chocolate and toasted pecans.

Kakao Chocolate, kakaochocolate.com; 2301 S. Jefferson Ave., 314-771-2310; 7272 Manchester Road, Maplewood, Mo., 314-645-4446; 7720 Forsyth Blvd., Clayton, Mo., 314-726-7974

After working with master candy-makers across the U.S., Dan Abel opened his first Chocolate Chocolate Chocolate Co. store in St. Louis in 1981. Now under second-generation owners, it has two stores in St. Louis and seven elsewhere in Missouri and Illinois. It also franchises its concept and operates a wholesale business through a St. Louis factory that's open for tours.

Each store has a kitchen where chocolates are made without artificial flavors, colors, preservatives or hydrogenated oils. In 2014, the company began using only Fair Trade Certified cocoa from farmers in Ivory Coast and sugar from Belize.

Chocolate Chocolate Chocolate Co., chocolatechocolate.com; 6740 Chippewa St., 314-832-2639; store and factory, 5025 Pattison Ave., 314-338-3501