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DIVERSIONS

Getting the Scoop on York's cold war

Vanilla still No. 1 among all flavours

BY ROY GREEN
Staff Writer

When I was a kid, ice cream came in three flavours: vanilla, chocolate and that triple-layered oddball called Neapolitan, which I hated.

Today there are, officially, umpteen flavours and a trend, soft ice cream, has come and is (almost) gone.

And that's not counting a whole new trend — gelato, the Italian ice cream, now popping up in multiple flavours, most notably in Woodbridge.

Because July is national ice cream month, Diversions decided to get the scoop on the current cold war in York Region.

First stop is the Baskin-Robbins outlet, with the familiar '31 Flavours' sign on Yonge Street in Richmond Hill.

Except, when I count the flavours available, there are way more than 31.

"The number is meaningless," says manager Jeff Peng, who is standing behind the frozen bins of French vanilla, rum raisin, pink bubble gum, mint chocolate chip and various yogurt-gone-crazy flavours.

He says they sell a few thousand cones every week. We add a new flavour every month. The 31 is just a logo identified with Baskin-Robbins.

According to the company's website, the 31 made its debut in 1953, when they offered customers a different ice cream for every day of the month.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Katie and Connor MacCallum are served Sinbad's triple punch sunset and pink bubble gum flavoured ice cream cones by Steve Huang at Baskin-Robbins in Richmond Hill.

In fact, they claim to have originated thousands of flavours and break them down into permanent ones, flavour of the month, seasonal flavours, even regional flavours.

But not this region. A check in the category reveals a New York French vanilla, but no ice cream peculiar to York Region.

Maybe they could consider a York yogurt for their next flavour of the month.

The most popular flavour, according to employee Kevin Huang, is jamoca almond fudge, followed by mint chocolate chip.

"And, maybe, pralines and cream," he adds.

But outside the store, an 11-year-old conehead named David is rapidly devouring a dripping delight called pink bubble gum. "Thish is the besht," he manages between licks.

His mom, Angela, daintily nibbles on a low-fat yogurt and says she is a traditionalist, vanilla, all the way.

There's a lot of myth associated with ice cream history, including tales of Marco Polo bringing it home to Italy from China and Catherine de Medici introducing

it in France in 1533, but the International Association of Ice Cream Manufacturers says it probably originated in China.

In 1774, a caterer in New York was offering it as a new product and the wife of American President James Madison served ice cream at her husband's inaugural ball in 1813.

The first Canadian to start selling ice cream was Thomas Webb of Toronto in 1850. William Neilson produced his first batch in Toronto in 1893.

See ICE CREAM, page 16.



Sheryl Greenspan

Notes on a Napkin

Restaurant offers menu to please all

ASIA HUT

Location: 9255 Woodbine Ave. (at 16th Avenue)

Phone: 905-887-6628

Type: Chinese

Entree Selection: Extensive

Price Range: Averages \$7 to \$9

Hours: 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Payment: Take note — cash only

Take out available

I've been to many Chinese restaurants in and around Markham, but this one is different. First, the décor is simple, clean and relaxing, with an interesting bamboo hut-style ceiling. And with almost 200 items on the menu, there is something for every taste from simple "Canadianized" sweet and sour chicken balls and fiery kung pao to a full selection of congee and dim sum.

To date, I have been to Asia Hut a dozen or so times, sampling more than half the menu and I vow not to rest until I've tasted it all.

My biggest dilemma when dining at Asia Hut is whether to start with the perfectly spiced hot and sour soup (\$3.49) loaded with Chinese mushrooms, bamboo and shredded pork, or the slightly sweet crab meat and corn soup (\$3.29) — creamy and delicious with delicate strands of egg. Both are, without exception, the best examples I've ever had.

This time, we opted for the crab and corn and threw in some spring rolls (\$3.29 for two) and pan-fried dumplings (\$4.99) as appetizers. Both the spring rolls and dumplings were crispy and stuffed to capacity.

See MOO SHU, page 16.

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