

Jacksonville students learn 'cool' lesson: Science of ice cream

Cafe teaches students about the chemistry of the confection to create new products.

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BRUCE LIPSKY/The Times-Union

Donna Klockeman, a dairy food scientist with TIC Gums, a Baltimore company, conducts the workshop with Jacksonville students. Twenty high school students participated in City Kidz Food Science & Culinary Art Incubator for Teens Jan. 15 in Jacksonville

By [David Bauerlein](#)

At City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe, there's more to ice cream than scooping it and eating it.

The cafe in Jacksonville's Springfield neighborhood is teaching eighth-grade and high school students about the chemistry of ice cream, drawing from the expertise of teachers in Cornell University's Department of Food Science.

After the students churn out ice cream based on their own recipes, cafe owner Clinton Bush hopes to swing a deal that would land the ice cream on supermarket shelves. The cartons would bear the logo City Kidz Branded Ice Cream with a tagline, "Formulated by Jacksonville Youth."

If it goes according to plan, Bush would increase his business revenues by licensing the City Kidz logo for the ice cream. His business would keep a portion of the money generated from licensing fees, and he would earmark the rest- the amount hasn't been determined - for college scholarships.

It's a tall order. Bush still must find a supermarket to mass produce the ice cream for retail sales at its stores. But he said the plan falls right in line with the City Kidz model of running a business that's both profitable and philanthropic. The cafe opened last year in the Third and Main building, 1303 N. Main St. He takes comfort, too, in seeing how Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream started by selling from a run-down gas station in Vermont. I'm amazed that Ben and Jerry's started with even less than I have," he said. "I'm sitting here thinking that we can do this."

Partnership with college

On the educational side of the venture, Bush has forged a partnership with Cornell University and business executives in the food industry. They launched an after-school program for 21 local students. Cornell University students have taught classes at the cafe, either by flying from New York or appearing in video feeds.

For Cornell University, whose food science program offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, the alliance gives it a chance to recruit students and expose them to food science.

"Everyone thinks food science is the same thing as food services," said Steve Andon, who sits on the Cornell Food Science Advisory Council and has advised Bush on the setup of the program. "People say, 'I don't want my son busing tables.'"

But it's actually a field with research and development based on biology and chemistry.

"There's a lot of engineering that goes into food," Andon said.

Andon is director of TIC Gums, a Baltimore company that provides a wide range of gum ingredients used for texture in foods - bakery items, beverages, dairy products, candies and meat. He had a chance encounter with Bush last year when he was traveling through Jacksonville and happened to stop at City Kidz Ice Cream Cafe. During their conversation, Bush said he wanted to expand the financial literacy program offered by City Kidz.

"He said, 'I really want to teach them food science,'" Andon recalled. "I said, 'This guy is crazy.'"

But Andon was intrigued. He knew Cornell University's Department of Food Science had a course in which students developed their own ice cream flavors while learning about the chemical properties that make one blend of ice cream taste different than another. Andon, who is retired and said he has no financial stake in City Kidz, tapped his contacts at Cornell University about teaching a series of ice cream classes at the cafe.

If the Jacksonville program succeeds, he plans to start a similar program in Baltimore.

He and Bush said they'd like to have a retailer on board to sell City Kidz Ice Cream by the summer. In the meantime, the students are meeting weekly. Bush said the racially diverse group meets another goal of the program because minorities are under-represented in food science careers.

"The kids get along really well," he said. "They're very smart and it's fun to sit back and watch. It's for the children and that's where the passion is."

david.bauerlein@jacksonville.com 904-3594581