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2 liquid nitrogen ice cream shops come to Virginia Beach – in the same shopping center

By Katherine Hafner
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Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot

Mary Jane Hamblin demonstrates how she uses liquid nitrogen to freeze her homemade gelato at Amazing Glazed in Virginia Be



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VIRGINIA BEACH

There's a chill in the air at KempsRiver Crossing shopping center.

One shop recently started serving ice cream frozen with liquid nitrogen, and owners of another plan to open soon just across the street.

Making the stuff is simple: Using a regular ice cream base, you pour in liquid nitrogen, which is so cold it instantly freezes the cream and evaporates into the air. There's an entertainment component from watching water vapor pour out of the bowl. The nitrogen is colorless and flavorless.

"You can't get fresher than I just froze it in front of you," said Mary Jane Hamblin, owner of Amazing Glazed, a doughnut shop that started serving liquid nitrogen frozen custard and gelato this month. The store already used nitrogen to make "nitro" coffee.

In mid-September, the first Virginia franchise of Utah-based Sub Zero Nitrogen Ice Cream will also open. Married couple Jeff and Maria Jaglowicz – a Navy veteran and Kempsville High School grad, respectively, own the place. Sub Zero was featured on the television show "Shark Tank."

"This thing with the other store, it's a complete coincidence," Hamblin said.

But she's disappointed nitrogen ice cream won't be exclusive to her store, even within the same shopping center. It's not the first in Hampton Roads, either: Sweet Turtle in Newport News already makes the stuff.

Hamblin opened the Virginia Beach location of Amazing Glazed last spring. At first, the Kempsville store was serving just frozen custard, but Hamblin said customers missed her gelato.

Liquid nitrogen was a good way to satisfy the demand, she said, because it doesn't require an expensive display case. And since it's made on-demand, she can offer more flavors.

The Jaglowiczes are OK with the competition.

“We don’t blame people for trying (nitrogen ice cream) because it’s so cool,” said Maria Jaglowicz. “We don’t want (them) to do badly because we don’t want people to get a bad (impression of the frozen treat).”

She said the nitrogen-blasted ice cream “is more dense and creamy” than regular ice cream. That’s because air doesn’t get in when it’s instantly frozen.

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The Jaglowiczes are excited to debut the process, as well as lactose-free and vegan menu options.

While Amazing Glazed uses a mixing bowl and pours in the liquid nitrogen, the Sub Zero strategy is a little different.

A pipe carrying the nitrogen runs under the counter. Customers order a cream flavor and mix-ins – cookie dough, gummy bears, peanut butter cups, etc. – which are then combined by hand in a bowl and blasted with the liquid to flash-freeze.

Sometimes, an order is accompanied by an employee yelling, “3, 2, 1, blast off!”

Why? Liquid nitrogen is stored at negative 321 degrees.

But making ice cream this way isn't "new at all," even if the trend is picking up steam, said Richard Hartel, a University of Wisconsin food science professor who specializes in frozen foods and desserts.

Dippin' Dots, for instance, the so-called "ice cream of the future" in the late 1980s, is made the same way, he said.

"It's a pretty simple idea, but the key is keeping it cold enough," he said. "The main advantage is you don't get those ice crystals" that form normally.

He doesn't think nitrogen ice cream will become the norm. "Liquid nitrogen is so expensive. It's really not a cost-effective way of making ice cream."

Jeff Jaglowicz said they don't have to use electricity to store huge amounts of pre-frozen ice cream, however, and there's no waste since it's served by the cup.

Sub Zero hasn't set the shop's prices yet, but he expects them to be in line with other ice cream shops.

Hamblin hopes to roll out nitrogen-made gelato at her Chesapeake store within a few months.

And on Sub Zero's grand opening day, she plans to sell Amazing Glazed products for half-off.

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