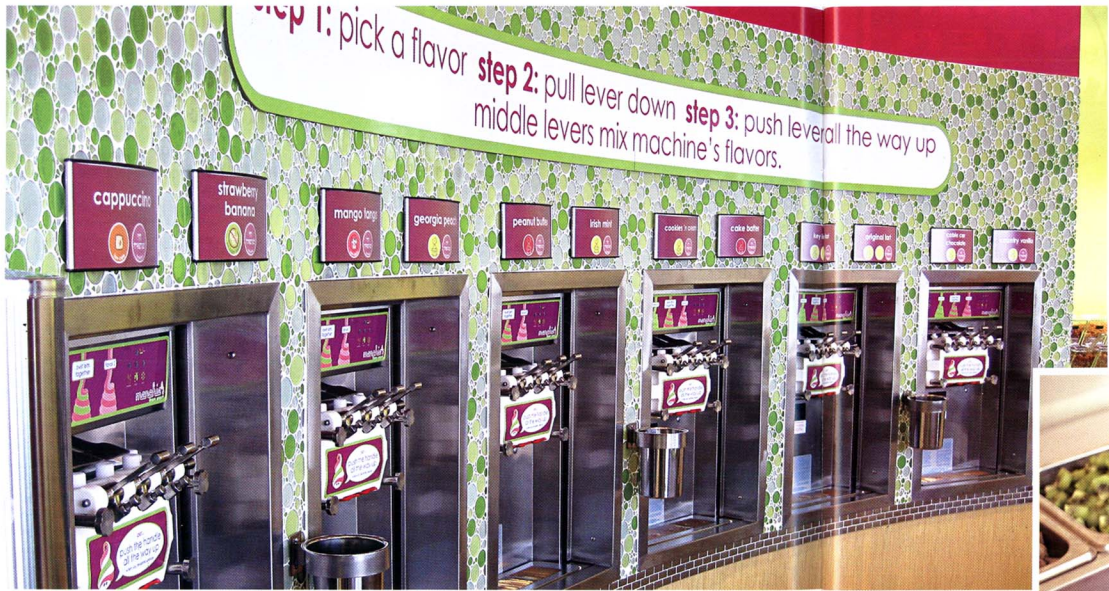




PROFILE



"I KEEP KOSHER, SO IT'S EXCITING TO KNOW THAT I CAN GET ANYTHING AND NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WHAT'S IN IT."
 — JULIE PINCHAK



VALLEY SPROUTS A RAINBOW OF FRO-YO

by EMILY KAPLAN

Menchie's got its start with a sweet tooth. When Danna and Adam Caldwell went out on one of their first dates, Adam took her to get self-serve frozen yogurt at his favorite neighborhood haunt. After indulging their sugar craving, Danna expressed shock that there were not more places to make personalized frozen yogurt creations.

"It really started with, 'I want a place where I can get my frozen yogurt fix every day,'" Danna said. "I could have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and every one would be different."

The couple opened their first store together in 2007, in Valley Village, two weeks before their wedding day. The Caldwells have since expanded the idea into a franchise company, with more than 30 locations in seven states, the newest of which can be found in Westlake Village. Thirty-five more are in development. All of the stores are decorated with Menchie's signature bright colors and whimsical decorations.

The name came from Adam's nickname for

Danna; at the time he thought it meant "blessing," although it actually translates to "good or generous man." Nevertheless, the couple nevertheless thought it was a good fit for the business, and the name stuck.

The storefront frozen yogurt craze, which kicked off in Los Angeles in 2005 with the hugely successful Pinkberry, has produced ubiquitous variations on the theme in California and on the East Coast. The Caldwells believe there is also an international potential for Menchie's, and they are planning to open stores this year in Canada, Australia, China and Japan, according to company CEO Amit Kleinberger.

All 100 yogurt flavors and all 60 toppings are made according to the rules of kashrut, although the stores are not kosher-supervised. In addition, the stores offer dairy-free options for lactose-intolerant customers, as well as fat-free selections.

Cake batter, vanilla, mango sorbet and the

plain frozen yogurt known as "tart" all are in the rotation. Toppings range from sprinkles and Oreo cookie bits to almonds, walnuts, brownie bites and various fresh fruit.

"I always like Menchie's because there are infinite flavors and combinations. Whatever I'm craving, they have," said customer Julie Pinchak, concocting her own creation. "Also, I keep kosher, so it's exciting to know that I can get anything and not have to worry about what's in it," she added.

Kleinberger said the company gives each franchisee the business model and the tools needed to create a venue.

"It's about an environment that provides a hap-

py atmosphere for the consumers," Kleinberger said. His personal favorite combination is cookies-and-cream frozen yogurt topped with granola and strawberries. "And that's after tasting every flavor out there," he said.

Danna Caldwell said the entire experience "has been an amazing ride for us. It's a great business to be in because people are always happy when they come in."

She said her go-to creation is ever changing, with one caveat:

"I always have to have rainbow sprinkles," she said. "I think the colorfulness in my cup just makes me happy."