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Food: Put your worries on ice

by Cheré Coen

Times are hard. It's difficult to find any person or business not feeling the current financial pinch.

Except at Blue Bell Ice Cream.

"In tough times, people reward themselves," said Blue Bell CEO and President Paul Kruse. "We see a lot of that now. Sales are going strong."

After Sept. 11, sales of Blue Bell Ice Cream spiked, Kruse said, adding that ice cream is a traditional American comfort food, one people turn to when feeling low.

So how does Lafayette deal with the stress and bad news of the current financial downturn?

According to Kruse, vanilla is the No. 1 flavor of Blue Bell Ice Cream, clocking in at 40 percent of all company brands sold, but every region has its own No. 2 preference. New Orleans, for instance, loves Banana Pudding. South Dallas chooses Buttered Almond and the Midwest prefers Black Walnut.

Lafayette residents, on the other hand, are partial to Cookies 'n Cream. Big time.

"Big sales in Louisiana, really strong," Kruse said.

Of course, that doesn't include the rotating flavors the 101-year-old Texas creamery produces. Blue Bell has 30 flavors going at any one time — with a total of about 45 each year — but they rotate seasonal flavors such as peaches (summer) and peppermint (winter). The company produces 300,000 cartoons every three months of typical seasonal flavors.

Some ice cream flavors win huge fans, such as the Birthday Cake and the Moo-llennium Crunch, in honor of last year's centennial. Others, such as dill and peanut butter and jelly bomb, Kruse explained.

"People would not buy it (peanut butter and jelly)," he said. "Some asked if there was bread in there."



Photo by Cheré Coen

Cups of Cookies n' Cream are mass-produced at the Blue Bell factory. Blue Bell has recorded big sales since onset of the 2008 financial crisis.

The company that began in 1907 as the Brenham Creamy Company still purchases all of its milk from a 200-mile radius of the Texas Hill Country, about an hour from Houston. They create their own chocolate and speciality items at the factory, as well.

"We start fresh from the cow, and you can't get any fresher than that," Kruse said.

So what's in store for the remainder of this year? You can sign up for e-mail bulletins (so you can rush out and buy up the flavor you enjoy that's disappearing for a while), rotating recipes and printable coupons at www.bluebell.com. But for all you Cookies 'n Cream lovers, Blue Bell just introduced Snickerdoodle, cinnamon ice cream with chunks of snickerdoodle cookies and a praline cinnamon swirl.

Recipe

Before you send your children out for Halloween, try these healthy and festive sandwiches from *The Holly Clegg Trim & Terrific Cookbook*.

Jack-O'-Lantern Sandwiches

2 slices dark bread (pumpnickel or dark whole wheat)
1 slice reduced-fat American cheese

Directions: On one slice of bread, cut out a jack-o'-lantern face. Place a slice of cheese on an uncut slice of bread. Broil or toast in the oven until the cheese is melted. Remove from the oven, and top with the cut slice of the bread. Makes one sandwich.



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