

## Matthew Hoffman '85

Before becoming Owner/CEO of his own ice cream business, Mark Hoffman '85 was in the restaurant business full time and would often conduct meetings at the Old Meeting House diner on South Howard Avenue in Tampa. The Old Meeting House, which opened in 1947 by Jim Strickland, was a popular restaurant and ice cream shop visited by several generations of Tampa residents.

"I got to know Mr. Strickland and became interested in buying his business once he decided it was time to sell," said Hoffman. "One day, we agreed over a hand shake that he would give me first right of refusal to buy the place. A year after we shook hands, I began making offers."

Hoffman bought the Old Meeting House about 11 years ago and ran it for a while as the original diner and ice cream shop. He ultimately realized that the fondest memories of most bay area residents were of the ice cream, and that's when he began to envision a new concept.

"Three generations of people in Tampa grew up with Old Meeting House ice cream," said Hoffman. "Grandparents would bring their grandchildren to the store and share stories of when they would enjoy ice cream at the Old Meeting House on afternoons when they were a child. We realized that the ice cream was the significant part of the business, so we decided to close the diner about three years ago and focus solely on the ice cream."

Hoffman began producing out of the small, 2,600-square-foot building on South Howard and quickly outgrew the space. He soon realized that he was going to need a larger facility that could house offices, have production and include a retail store.

"Everyone wanted to know how they could get the ice cream," said Hoffman. "There were hotels, scoop and dip shops and coffee houses that would carry our ice cream, but not many of them were in the local area. We needed a place for people to taste our products and where we could showcase them."



Matthew Hoffman '85 had a vision to create a place where people can walk off the street and see real people making ice cream.

Knowing that the labor and overhead were already present, Hoffman created a retail shop that included a branded concept where ice cream, coffee and pies are showcased together and complement each other.

"Now, when people ask what we do, we can bring them into the retail store and show our products. It's hard to make it just on ice cream, so we sell coffee and pies as well."

Joffrey's Coffee and Mike's Pies are featured at the new location on 4004 South MacDill Avenue. There are dozens of menu items to choose from, and the inside dining area includes a lounge area with board games.

Hoffman acknowledges that some of the best things about owning his own company are also some of the most challenging.

"It's great being able to set my own schedule because I'm a dad and husband," said Hoffman. "I love the flexibility, but being flexible also means if the phone rings at midnight because the store alarm is going off, I'm the one that's coming down to meet the police to find out whether it's a break in or false alarm."

It's a lot more responsibility, and you can't check it at the door when you leave at night."

Meeting payroll, sales projections, expenses and staffing are also critical components to a successful operation. Hoffman's biggest recommendation for those thinking about branching out on their own is to receive hands-on experience in the industry before making a large investment.

"Learn on someone else's dime," said Hoffman. "If you want to open a restaurant, first work for a successful



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restaurant company and watch how they do things. Otherwise, there could be some costly lessons learned that many people may not have the financial backing to recover from."

After gaining the knowledge and experience, Hoffman stresses the importance of being financially stable to the point where one could afford to not make any money for at least a little while. "There are always risks in being an entrepreneur. You've got to be willing to take those risks but fully understand what you're up against."

One of the many contributing factors that separates the Old Meeting House from its industry counterparts is Hoffman's passion for making ice cream. For example, his well-known pistachio ice cream is made using a unique process where raw pistachios are roasted in house, using butter and salt. Afterward, they are folded into a naturally flavored pistachio ice cream as it's coming out of the machine, known as a dasher. It's not the usual neon green because there are no artificial flavors or colors.

"It's a craft," said Hoffman. "The majority of flavors are my recipes. I put on my lab coat and hair net, and we go in and play with flavors to see what works. I'm also a visual person, so I love to sit back and conceptually think about an idea, look at what it can be and try to get it there."

Part of his vision was to create a place where people can walk off the street and see real people making ice cream. Kids, grandparents, moms and dads are all a part of it. Whether it's a little girl coming in with her mom after school because she made an "A" on the test, or a group of friends stopping by for dessert after dinner, Hoffman values being a part of those experiences.

"Not too many people frown or get angry when you walk in with ice cream, and my children's friends all know me as 'The Ice Cream Man,' said Hoffman. "I enjoy having a product that delights people and running a business that is focused around memories."

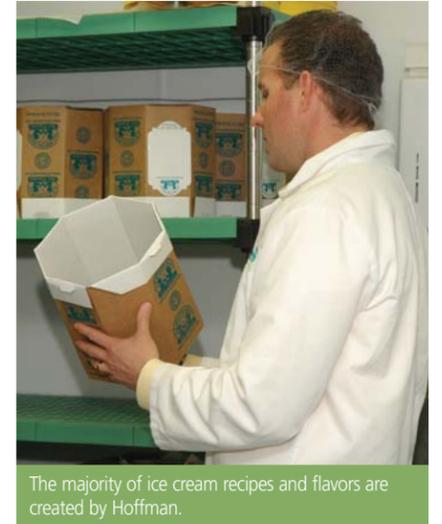
Outside of work, Hoffman enjoys creating memories of his own with his wife, Kimberly, and two children, Olivia and Colton, who both attend Berkeley.

"Being in the restaurant business, I love to cook for family and friends, and my kitchen is my playground," said Hoffman. "I also love the outdoors and love to water ski, mountain bike, kayak and do anything that keeps me active. I have great flexibility in my schedule right now, but I would like to spend even more time with my family." Hoffman coaches his son's soccer team and is Board Chairman of Ruth Eckerd Hall. His background also includes land development, and he still dabbles in that area as well.

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In his spare time, he volunteers at Berkeley and remembers how his days as a student at the school prepared him for life and his career.

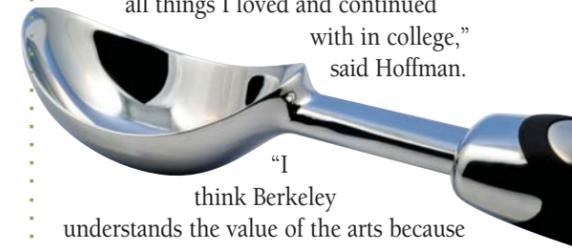
"Berkeley made college like 13th grade because the teachers were committed to helping me become successful," recalls Hoffman. "While I was there, I struggled in math, but Thom Morris and Manny Suarez were always there for me. I'll never forget working with Manny Suarez while he tutored me for what seemed to be an endless hour after school. I got a 94



The majority of ice cream recipes and flavors are created by Hoffman.

percent on the test he prepared me for and felt such a great sense of accomplishment and achievement."

In addition to the academic aspect of the school, Hoffman discovered his talents on stage while at Berkeley. "Participating in advanced drama and chorus, performing in plays and musicals and touring were all things I loved and continued with in college," said Hoffman.



"I think Berkeley understands the value of the arts because of its connection to confidence, expression, speaking, elocution, poise and all the things you learn outside of talent and ability. I have a pre-kindergartner and a second grader, and seeing how the arts are used in their experiences and how that helps them is really wonderful."



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