



Ice Cream Sunday

Our roving reporter goes sleuthing to find MacKay's recipe for 60 years of success

STORY PATRICIA ALDERSON • PHOTO CAROLINE CONNOLLY

Being a longtime ice cream fan, I melted at the chance to get the scoop on the 60th anniversary of MacKay's Cochrane Ice Cream Ltd. I decided to go undercover to investigate the legendary establishment. Local folklore says ice cream probably flows through the family veins. Was this the key to six decades of success? I needed to find out.

Before I ventured into their old-fashioned shoppe on 1st Street, I did some behind-the-scenes sleuthing for clues to the luxurious taste of MacKay's ice cream. Apparently, they use Alberta cream and only Alberta cream. And not the fat-reduced kind, either—17 per cent butterfat to be exact, compared to the 10 per cent butterfat used by most commercial ice cream makers. They keep their operation local and churn out product in a factory around the corner. You can buy MacKay's ice cream at selected stores outside town, but not at any major supermarkets. A call to company headquarters explained this: "We align ourselves with other independents; we are the little guy and we are craft," said Carolyn Horwitz in marketing and sales. The MacKays are proud of their Cochrane roots and have helped make the town a destination for visitors from all over the world.

Some scientific researchers say eating ice cream lifts the spirits. It's been reported that people who enjoy ice cream are more likely to


be happy and relaxed than stressed—perhaps because the ingredients trigger the brain chemical serotonin. While it's unlikely James and Christina MacKay knew much about serotonin in 1948 when they decided to offer ice cream at their general store, they were onto something. Something big.

By the mid-seventies, the general store shelves were cleared and the MacKays focused on catering to the soaring demand for their top quality, locally produced ice cream. In 1983, two of the MacKay children, Rhona and Robyn took over the family business. They experimented with new and unusual flavours, just as their father had and, to date, more than 300 flavours have been enjoyed—one lick at a time.

Facts are fine, but I needed to experience MacKay's first-hand. I found the joint easily enough—hard to miss the ribbon of people winding out the door and down the sidewalk. Listening to the chatter about the 50-plus flavours available inside helped pass the time. Descriptions of the velvety smoothness of anticipated cones made my mouth water. Adults shared memories of their own childhood family trips to Cochrane for an ice cream in years gone by. Something suddenly clicked.

As I stood in line that investigative Sunday, I realized I didn't need to look any further than the frosty tubs of ice cream on one side of the

counter and eager faces on the other. There is no mystery, no secret to the success of this longtime family business. Every day is a great day for ice cream, and the MacKay family has worked hard over the last 60 years to give an extraordinary home-made taste sensation to all who enter their doors. Robyn MacKay says, "We want to keep people happy by producing the most blissful treat on the planet."

I had a double: Pralines and Cream topped with Rum and Raisin. Blissful, indeed. 
www.mackaysicecream.com

Tasty Tidbits about MacKay's

- First flavours: Vanilla, followed by Chocolate, Maple Walnut, then Strawberry
- Best-sellers today: Chocolate, followed by Vanilla, then Strawberry
- Cost of a cone in 1948: 10¢
- Famous coneheads who've stopped by: Brad Pitt, Christopher Reeves, Jane Seymour, Larry Hagman
- Most unusual ice cream request: a wedding cake—the couple was married right outside the store
- Some specialty flavours: White Cheddar (for apple pie), Thai Chili (coconut & peanut butter), Purple Yam, Chai Tea, Mayan Chocolate (with chili and cinnamon), Limoncello sorbet
- Number of scoops served in 60 years: 15 million

PATRICIA ALDERSON