

BY HALEY SHAPLEY ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY KIMBERLY DAVIS

CONE HEADS

We love our ice cream,
especially when the Texas
heat is screamin'

you never need an excuse to eat ice cream, but in case you're looking for a special reason to taste your way around Texas, read on. July is National Ice Cream Month and, thus, is the perfect opportunity to compare and contrast the most scrumptious scoops out there. Here are eight great ice cream parlors to get you started.

Cole Ellis and his 2-year-old son, Graham, prove that kids of all ages love Sweet Firefly's Kooky Monster ice cream.



Sweet Firefly

ICE CREAMS

It took Sweet Firefly co-owners Patti Otte and Angie Conard quite some time to settle on a name. When *firefly* flew into their minds, they thought it perfectly captured the essence of a relaxing summer night in the backyard, laughing with friends, eating ice cream, and watching the fireflies.

The women integrated that vibe into their homey shop, which they opened in 2011. It's a popular gathering spot for families. Little ones love Kooky Monster, a vanilla ice cream, dyed blue, with chocolate chip cookie bits. Even with all those kids, Sweet Firefly prides itself on cleanliness, with nary a sticky table to be found—although there are plenty of blue-tinged grins.

Find It 2701 Custer Parkway, Richardson. (972) 635-5635; facebook.com/sweetfireflyrichardson.



Fab Flavors
Kooky Monster (inset),
Sea Salt Caramel (right),
Cinnamon Coffee
Toffee, Bourbon
Vanilla

Fab Flavor
Kulfi



(At right) Falooda with taro and chai

Old Town

CREAMERY

Sure, you can get your standard Chocolate Fudge at Old Town Creamery, but you'd be missing out on where the shop really excels. It's the international options such as rose-based Falooda, sweet Thai Tea, and fruit-filled Lychee that bring the wow factor. Kulfi, a frozen Indian dessert flavored with almond, pistachio, and cardamom, is by far the best seller, says owner Hussain Kedwaii.

Find It 6205 Coit Road, Plano. (972) 673-0285; oldtowncreamery.com.

Amy's

ICE CREAMS

Amy Simmons originally wanted to be a neurosurgeon, but a whole lot of people are pretty happy she decided to open an ice cream shop instead.

Since 1984, this Austin institution has delighted ice cream enthusiasts with a variety of flavors. In addition to seven standards, Amy's produces an average of one new flavor per week. No ingredient is too weird to try, says ice cream maker Joe Morris, and that includes fire-roasted habaneros, lavender, barrel-aged tequila, and wasabi. Not every new flavor makes the cut, but most will be tested on the menu to see what the public thinks.

You'll often catch servers juggling scoops, and they even compete in Amy's annual Trick Olympics to see who has the best high-flying, ice cream-tossing maneuvers. Calendar that for next June at the 1012 W. Sixth Street location in Austin.

Find It

13 locations in Austin, plus one each in Houston and San Antonio. amysicecreams.com.

Fab Flavor
Mexican Vanilla



Amy Simmons

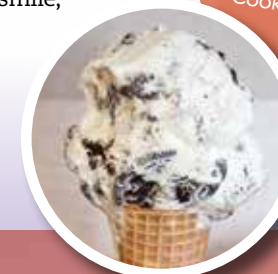
Hank's

ICE CREAM

Although Hank of Hank's Ice Cream passed away a couple years ago, his ice cream-making lives on at the family-owned shop, which turns 29 this year. "He's the one who made this business famous," says Okemah Wiggins, Hank's wife. "He had a handsome smile, and he talked to everyone who came in." What did they talk about? Probably just how tasty the ice cream is. The mix-ins don't hurt, either, with generous amounts of roasted nuts in the Butter Pecan and whole wafers in the Banana Pudding.

Find It 9291 S. Main Street, Houston. (713) 665-5103; hanksicecream.com.

Fab Flavors
Butter Pecan, Banana Pudding (bottom),
Cookies-and-Cream (inset)



(From left) Isaiah Dejohnette (Hank's grandson), Okemah Wiggins (Hank's wife), Aladrian Mims (Hank's daughter), and family friend Dennis Knight all work at the shop.





Shop Manager Rachel Hertenberger

Lick HONEST ICE CREAMS

Inside Lick's cheerful, robin's-egg blue walls, even patrons who can't eat ice cream have choices, since dairy-free and vegan options are offered daily. The traditionalists will be happy to know the milk is fresh from the Miller family dairy farm in McGregor, where a small, grass-fed herd is free of hormones and antibiotics. Local ingredients are used regularly in interesting combinations, such as the smooth Coconut and Avocado Curd, the tart Grapefruit with Champagne Marshmallows, and the shop's summery original flavor, Cilantro Lime.

Find It

2032 S. Lamar Boulevard,
Austin. (512) 363-5622;
ilikelick.com.



Fab Flavors

Cilantro Lime (inset),
Caramel Salt Lick,
Goat Cheese
Thyme and Honey

La King's CONFECTIONERY

Authentic working soda fountains aren't easy to find, but at La King's, you can enjoy your malt, shake, or ice cream soda from just such a cultural gem: a 1920s soda fountain that was originally in a drugstore. "It's a pretty good working piece of art," says owner Mitch King.

Old pine floors, white marble counters, and antique arcade machines all contribute to the 1920s vibe, staying true to the business' origins when King's grandfather began making candy in 1927.

The ice cream is made on-site under the Purity brand, the oldest operating ice cream manufacturer in Texas. The classic confectionery also sells hundreds of types of chocolates and candies, as well as famous saltwater taffy, the making of which the public can watch.

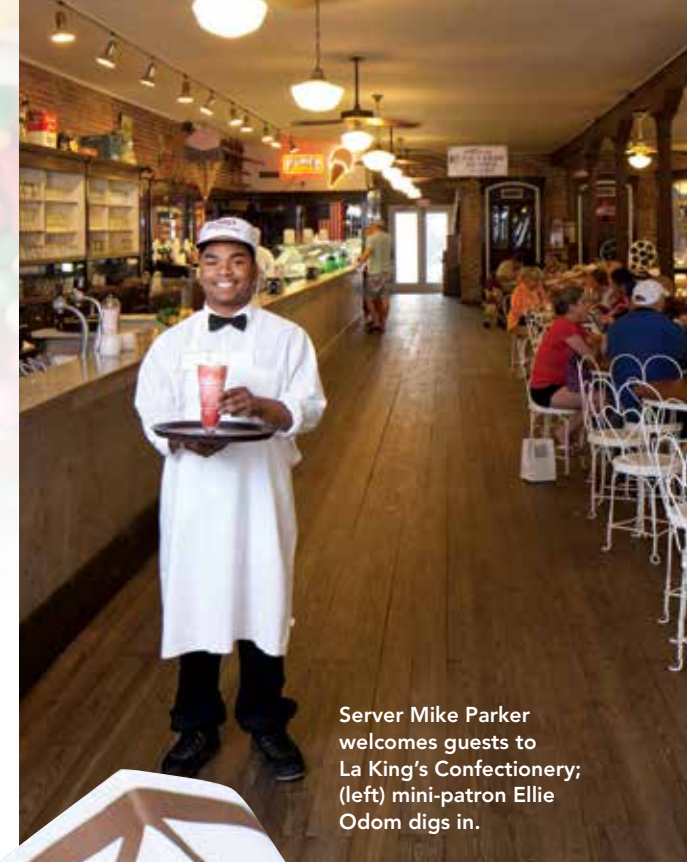
Find It

2323 Strand
Street, Galveston.
(409) 762-6100; lakings
confectionery.com.



Fab Flavors

Mint Chocolate
Chip (inset),
Cookies-and-
Cream



Server Mike Parker
welcomes guests to
La King's Confectionery;
(left) mini-patron Ellie
Odom digs in.

Beth Marie's OLD FASHIONED ICE CREAM

When Bob and Joanne Moses bought a circa-1876 building on Denton's courthouse square in 1998, it was much more space than they needed for their design shop, so they set out to find another business to occupy half of the building. That turned out to be Beth Marie's Old Fashioned Ice Cream. With its house-made ice cream and the shop's vintage touches such as pressed-metal ceilings and fresh-baked waffle cones, Beth Marie's quickly became a hot spot. Today, the busy downtown shop welcomes a steady stream of customers every day, and a second location has opened in the southwestern reaches of town. While vanilla- and chocolate-based flavors sell best, other favorites include Red Wine and Bleu (port wine and crumbled blue cheese), Texas Doctor (praline pecans and Dr Pepper syrup), and Hog Wild (bacon bits, chocolate, and maple swirl).

Find It On courthouse square (940-384-1818), and at 2900 Wind River Lane (940-591-1010), both in Denton; bethmaries.com.



Fab Flavors

Dark Chocolate,
Vanilla, KW's
Extreme Sundae
(inset)

Patrons
Evan
Templeton
and Emma
Quigley
slurp
shakes.



Blue Bell CREAMERIES

You can't talk about ice cream in Texas without mentioning Blue Bell, which started as the Brenham Creamery Company in 1907 and has grown into the nation's third-best-selling ice cream brand. At least one carton can be found in the freezers of nearly all Texans.

Despite the widespread success, the company still calls itself the "little creamery in Brenham." Visitors can tour the factory on weekdays to watch the ice cream-making process from start to finish. "It was almost like being at the North Pole, watching elves preparing for Christmas," one Yelp reviewer wrote.

Savor a scoop at tour's end, your choice from a rotating menu of 50-plus flavors. You'll be in good company if you pick best-selling Homemade Vanilla, which former President George W. Bush has been known to serve. ☺

Find It 1101 S. Blue Bell Road, Brenham.
(800) 327-8135; bluebell.com.

Freelance writer Haley Shapley is a regular contributor to Texas Journey.



Oscar the dog
enjoys Blue Bell's
Homemade Vanilla.

Fab Flavor

Homemade Vanilla
(sometimes plain ol'
vanilla is what
hits the spot)