

The New Creamery, Two Years Later

by Gary Abdullah

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE evolving role of the Berkey Creamery on the University Park campus is encapsulated in the fact that Kaitlin Bennett is not thinking about ice cream. Clutching a tall coffee at a table in the Creamery's sales-room, Kaitlin is oblivious to Peachy Paterno or bitter-sweet mint. Her focus is on a finance textbook as she treasures the combination of Wi-Fi, space to spread out, and a hot cup of java. Late on a weekday afternoon, she looks back none too fondly on the Creamery's Borland Laboratory days.

"When it was crowded there, you couldn't study," she says. "I use this location a lot more. I have all of my classes in the Business Building nearby, so I'm

here daily. I like doing my work at the Creamery because it has food and space to stretch out, and I think they make the best coffee on campus. During the day people come in randomly between classes just to get work done."

In August 2006, the Department of Food Science moved one block from Borland Laboratory to the newly constructed Food Science Building. The Berkey Creamery—renamed in honor of benefactors Earl and Jeanne Berkey—also moved to its fourth location in its 146-year history. The new venue allowed for an expanded Creamery manufacturing plant and storefront with vastly increased space and capabilities. The change created some concern among Penn Staters with a sentimental attachment to the Borland Lab location. But Creamery assistant manager James Brown explains that the ever-expanding popularity of the Creamery and its famous products made the move from Borland inevitable.

"We outgrew everything: the electricity, water pressure, freezers and coolers, vats, tubs, and containers," he says. "Demand for Creamery products has increased over the years, but supply and storage area didn't. In Borland we were maxed out, especially for ice cream on football weekends. From the time that we moved in to now, we've had a 30 to 40 percent increase. Sales at the new Berkey Creamery are approximately 100,000 half-gallons per year, whereas the old Creamery at Borland hit in the 60,000 to 70,000 range. Our production has increased from five mixes of five or six flavors a week up to nine mixes per week."





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Brown reports that the new location has grown on people who appreciate how tradition can be enhanced by new capabilities. “Over two years, the tradition has grown on our customers,” he says, “and not just the people who loved the old place, but new parents, alumni, and students see why it had to move. It’s not just more production and more seating but more variety. We created a more enjoyable, friendly atmosphere where groups could meet—the busloads of school kids, the alumni tours, the field trips, the summer camps.”

The heart of the new facilities is the Creamery plant, which includes a milk-processing area, ice cream area, and cultured products room. Viewing windows allow visitors to watch the production of ice cream, cheese, yogurt, and other items. Next to the Creamery, the food science department has pilot plants for experimental processing of fruits and vegetables, confections, powders, chocolates, baked goods, cereals, and snack foods.

“The new location gives industry access to state-

of-the-art facilities and gives food science students a place to work with updated equipment,” he says. “Pennsylvania has many small food manufacturers, and they can do research and development with us at a cost that’s probably much less than they could incur building their own testing facility. Now we have the equipment and expertise to evaluate products and do taste-testing in our sensory lab.”

A case in point is Dr. Bob’s Strawberry Low-Fat Yogurt Smoothie, a new product born from the probiotics research of food scientist Bob Roberts. After Roberts demonstrated that beneficial bacteria could be incorporated into a stable, tasty drink with an acceptable shelf life, the Creamery produced the drink, bottled it, and stocked it for sale in the Creamery store—something not possible at its previous location. Brown says it’s just one example of how the Creamery responds to consumer needs.

“Probiotics are good bacteria that can help the digestive system, so we wanted to get Bob Roberts’s re-



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search to our customers,” he says. “And after we got requests from the University dining halls for teas, we started producing and bottling our own line of regular, green, and diet teas.”

The Borland location was already one of the biggest university creamery facilities in the nation before the expansion more than doubled its available space. As part of the largest food science building in the country, the new facilities bring national attention to the Creamery and the University, Brown says. “We’re getting a lot of publicity from features on the History Channel, the Travel Channel, and the Big Ten Network and in different magazines across the nation,” he notes.

“I met a couple in the salesroom looking at our brochure, and they said they were from California,” Brown says. “I asked what brought them to Penn State, and they said they’d been watching the Travel Channel when they saw a TV program on the Creamery. They decided to fly here to see what we’re all

about. That was amazing—they’re not alums and have no affiliation with the University.”

Whether they come from across the country or across campus, customers are ordering more than just ice cream cones and shakes. Along with dairy products, sandwiches, fruit, and bagels, the Creamery’s selection has been expanded to include salads, wraps, a wider variety of sandwiches, pizza, and stromboli. Philadelphia-style soft pretzels are the latest addition. The near future will see international gourmet teas, premium cheeses, and gourmet mustards.

“We’d also like to install large-screen TVs for promotion, entertainment, and recruitment,” he says. “We’d entertain customers with Penn State sports as they get their ice cream, or introduce them to aspects of food science and other majors. We have visitors from two to ninety-two years old, and our mission is to give them more insight into what they’re eating, how it’s produced, and the importance of food science.”