

## EXTRA HELPINGS

# Twistee Treat chills in Ocala

By [Rick Allen](#)

Columnist

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Who in their right mind would open an ice cream stand during the coldest week in January?

Would you believe the new Twistee Treat on Southwest College Road? And for good reason.

"Nearly every kid we hire, this is their first job," said Corey Balzer, president of the Orlando-based chain. "It's like training camp; it gives the kids a chance to get a high sense of confidence before the peak season hits."

And the peak season, added Gary Marlin, the general manager of the new Ocala outlet, begins in a few days, on Feb. 15.

It's still the middle of winter, but gauging by Facebook, a lot of local folks are indulging anyway.

"Love it," noted one patron. "The best," wrote another.

"Twistee Treat really is as delicious as everyone says," Vicki Weaver added on Facebook. "The ice cream is super creamy, and the portions are very generous. The staff is just as wonderful as their ice cream. It was packed, but the wait wasn't bad at all. We will definitely be back."

The new Twistee Treat at 2394 SW College Road — in front of Hobby Lobby — opened the last weekend in January with 21 newbies on staff.

"It's not enough," Marlin said. "We've been busier than expected."

Among the first-time workers is Caylie Hulett, a 17-year-old senior who said she's on a work-study schedule; in other words, she has enough credits already to graduate, so she gets to spend some hours during the school week gainfully employed.

"It was nerve-racking at first," she said. "I've never had a job before, and it was so fast-paced. But I got used to it."

In just a few weeks, she's greeting and serving like a pro.

And that's the point, Balzer added.

In business since the early '80s, Twistee Treat, with its distinctive dipped-cone-shaped buildings — "we're the only building that looks like what you eat," Balzer said — opted to expand into Ocala on a recommendation.

"Ocala is a great town," he said.



Steve Floethe/Correspondent

The new Twistee Treat opened on Southwest College Road in January.

Their popularity and traffic surveys confirmed that this spot would be a good site for a new unit.

So popular, in fact, that Balzer said they're already looking at another site on State Road 200 west of Interstate 75 to open, perhaps, next January.

Balzer said the chain plans to open 15 to 20 new units per year around Central Florida.

The choices are surprisingly abundant; standard flavors are, well, standard — vanilla, chocolate, strawberry and blends of the three. For an extra 50 cents, you can get one of 18 “premium” flavors ranging from Amaretto to peanut butter to rum raisin.

Then there's the way they can be served: cones or cups, twirls, shakes and sundaes. It's no wonder people spend time pondering the choices before deciding.

And if you want something before the soft-swirl, Twistee also offers Nathan hot dogs — the same kind used at the annual July Fourth Hot Dog Eating Championship on Coney Island in New York.

■ ■ ■

**No mistaking it:** Well, the sign on the door the other day at Don Chepe Café at Southeast 17th Street and 25th Avenue made it pretty clear: “Closed for Good!!”

Owner Jose Moreno, who based himself at his offshoot Latin American quick-service restaurant last summer while his Mesa de Noche was closed for expansion and renovations, was not immediately available for comment by deadline.

We'll keep trying. Stay tuned.

Contact Rick Allen at [rick.allen@starbanner.com](mailto:rick.allen@starbanner.com) or 867-4154.

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