

# Up Front

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## Owners of Frost —

Stephen Ochoa (left) and Jeff Kaiserman — hope to operate 25-50 shops domestically and internationally. Kris Hanning Photo.

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# A Cool Couple of Guys

**EATING GELATO IS A WORKDAY PERK FOR JEFF KAISERMAN AND STEPHEN OCHOA**, owners of Frost, a Gelato Shoppe.

A well deserved one, too, as they operate nine shops, including three stores in Tucson and franchise outlets in Phoenix, Chicago and Albuquerque, as well as in the Middle East. Crunched for time already, rewarding themselves with one of Frost's 38 gourmet flavors is about to become less frequent, as Kaiserman and Ochoa will open two more stores by the end of the year, including a second shop in Kuwait.

Best friends, the two met in second grade at Manzanita Elementary School. They attended Orange Grove Middle School together and their lives intertwined after school. "We lived in the same neighborhood and my dad was the coach of our little league baseball team," Kaiserman says. They parted company during high school, with Kaiserman attending Catalina Foothills and Ochoa going to Salpointe Catholic, but came back together for college. Both graduated from the University of Arizona with majors in communications and minors in business.

"We tossed around a lot of ideas," Kaiserman says about starting a business together. "Many of them were bird-brained, ideas where the market was already saturated or seasonal." Kaiserman's father, Michael, suggested the idea of a gelato store after a family vacation to Italy. "Gelato differs from ice cream in that it contains three to eight percent butter fat compared to ice cream, which has up to 25 percent butter fat," Ochoa explains. "And sorbet is made from fruit and water, so it contains no butter fat."

Running with this idea, they conducted market research and found that gelato sells well in year-round warm weather markets like Arizona and the Middle East. Thus, Frost Gelato was born.

Kaiserman and Ochoa learned the art of crafting gelato at a school in North Carolina. "Pineapple remains my favorite flavor," Ochoa admits. "It was the first one I learned to make." Kaiserman is partial to coconut because, "it's unique, something you can't find every day."

Although fruity flavors tempt Frost's owners, chocolate is the first choice among their clientele, with Chicago-area customers diverging from the norm with cravings for sea salt caramel.



Frost owners Stephen Ochoa (left) and Jeff Kaiserman. Kris Hanning Photo.

The first Frost opened in 2005 at Casa Adobes Plaza. "We were walking zombies for several years," Kaiserman says. They could eat all the gelato they wanted, but, "We lost weight because we were working so hard." The long hours showed, too. "One customer came into the store and gave us individual pillows, so that we could take naps in the office."

The two kept going though, propelled by "seeing the sheer joy on customers' faces when they come in the door," says Ochoa. "We've had such wonderful support from the community, customers that we don't even know by name, telling us how proud they are of us."

The two have fun working together. "We're best friends, almost brothers," Ochoa says. "But we realize we don't know everything, so the more advice we get, the better off we are." Kaiserman and Ochoa often seek input from their original investors: Kaiserman's parents, Robin Sue and Michael Kaiserman, and prior to his death in 2011, Ochoa's grandfather, Irvin Tiahnybik, a successful business owner himself. "We also established an advisory board, made up of lawyers, engineers and food industry specialists," Ochoa adds. "When we need input about opening a franchise in a new location, or a store layout, or purchasing new equipment, we turn to our board."

Between the three Tucson stores with 42 employees and their franchise shops in three states and Kuwait, "there are a lot of moving parts," Ochoa says. "We each dabble in everything, but Jeff primarily trains and manages employees while I focus on the inventory, shipping, and finances." Together they work on operations and support of their franchise owners. "When we have a new store opening up, both of us, along with Frost's Gelato Chef, Nazario Melchionda, offer two weeks of on-site support. We set-up, train, and make sure the opening is off to a good start."

Ochoa's motto is, "Grow slow to grow fast." "When we started, we never thought we'd be where we are today." He's not sure where the next nine years will take them but he knows that they will continue to focus on the quality of their products. If their hard work pays off, Kaiserman and Ochoa hope to operate 25 to 50 units both domestically and internationally.

Kaiserman is married to Julia Kaiserman, a Pima County prosecutor. They have a son, Charlie, who is one year old.

Ochoa is married to Haley Greene Ochoa, owner of Posh Boutique, a high-end clothing consignment store. They have a six-year old daughter, Tennyson, and a pet hamster named Cupcake. — Lisa K. Harris