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Jeffersonville shop offers varieties of flavored popcorn

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JEFFERSONVILLE — Customers can choose from a variety of a classic snack at a new Jeffersonville business, whether they enjoy their popcorn sweet, spicy, cheesy or buttery.

Poppin' Flavors Gourmet Popcorn, located at 1703 Charlestown New Albany Pike, celebrated its ribbon cutting Monday with One Southern Indiana and local officials. The popcorn shop opened in May.

Poppin' Flavors is owned by Jeffersonville couple Tracy and Alphonzo "Al" Brown. Their kids, Torrie and Bryson, help out at the shop. The shop started with 15 flavors when it first opened, but it now features about 30 varieties with flavors such as Garlic Parmesan, Rainbow Candy Corn, Caramel Bourbon Peanut and Dill Pickle.

"Popcorn was just a passion of ours — we loved traveling around and trying different popcorns for years, and we both know how to cook," Tracy said. "Al is the cake guy at church, so desserts always went well with him, and I would always cook, so it worked. We tried to do something that was fun and a little bit creative that we could do together."

Al said that when you taste a popcorn kernel at Poppin' Flavors, "you actually taste a flavor." Spice blends and seasonings are made in house.

"You're not just tasting popcorn — you're tasting whatever that flavor is, so if it's cookies and cream, the popcorn kernel tastes like cookies and cream, so it's not just laid upon the popcorn — it's in the popcorn," Al said. "There's a difference."

About a year ago, the family began working toward its goal of opening the business, and they researched and experimented with different types of popcorn and flavors.

Al is blind in his right eye — he has gone through 20 surgeries since he woke up blind about five years ago because of diabetic retinopathy.

Previously, he had a long career in the IT field, but with his disability, he had to make some adjustments to lower his stress levels, he said. He also received vocational rehab support in opening the popcorn business.

For Al, making popcorn is relaxing, he said, and the business was a new opportunity for him.

"I have a disease which is not going to go away — I just have to change my lifestyle, which I have done," he said.

Since opening, they have loved getting to know their customers.

"The joy that we get from it is when we provide it to our friends and our customers," Al said. "People come in these doors as customers, but they're leaving out this door as our friend. There is not one customer that we have not befriended."

Tracy said they try to make the flavors "individualized" for a variety of tastes. Certain flavors will remain the same, but they also rotate flavors on a weekly basis so people can try something new when they stop by the business, Al said.

Their 12-year-old daughter, Torrie, came up with flavors such as Birthday Cake and Ragin' Cajun, and the family listens to flavor ideas from both customers and staff — one staff member recently came up with the idea for a Vanilla Latte popcorn.

"People are creative, people are receptive to us and excited, and we listen to them to see what flavors work for them," Tracy said.

Through the shop's Poppin' with a Purpose program, they are providing popcorn or a percentage of popcorn sales to local nonprofits.

Tracy hopes that the family's business is an inspiration to show their kids they can build their own dreams, as well as helping them understand the hard work involved in owning a business, she said.

"I wanted to make sure they know entrepreneurship is available to you if you want to do it and if it's something you have a passion for," she said.

Al said the business is a "new chapter" in his life.

"For me, it means that I now have freedom, I have control of not only who I am, but who I could be and who my kids could be," he said. "It also gives me an opportunity to show the community that it doesn't matter if you have a disability — you can still become whatever you want to be."

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