Screamin' Mimi's celebrates its 30th anniversary

The ice cream parlor will celebrate 30 years of great scoops today, Saturday, Oct. 18, from 12 to 5 pm

LAURA HAGAR RUSH

OCT 18, 2025

Screamin' Mimi's is celebrating its 30th anniversary today—and it all started with Mimi's Mud, that delightful confection of espresso ice cream, cookies, fudge and chocolate chips. Here's how it happened:

Maraline “Mimi” Mazzetti Olson moved to Sebastopol in 1994 and discovered much to her surprise that no one in town sold homemade ice cream.

“I love ice cream, and where I grew up on the East Coast, there were lots of homemade ice cream parlors,” Mimi said. “So I went all over the place. I actually drove down to Santa Cruz because I’d heard about Mary Ann’s, and I drove to San Luis Obispo because I heard that their college had an ice cream shop. I would go anywhere looking for homemade ice cream.”

And then, tired of driving, she started making her own ice cream at home. When she mixed up that first batch of Mimi’s Mud, her husband Kurt Olson—a chemical engineer—was bowled over.

“He realized I was really good at making ice cream,” she said.

He encouraged her to write a business plan and open a shop. She decided to give it a go.

Maraline “Mimi” Mazzetti Olson founded Screamin’ Mimi’s on Oct. 28, 1995.

Mazzetti Olson, who grew up in New York's Hudson Valley, had never even worked in an ice cream parlor, but she had run her own business for eight years — a clothing boutique in New York.

Soon she started looking for a location, and the building at the corner of Petaluma Avenue and Hwy. 12 just called her name.

"I wanted that location so badly, because it just screamed to me—like the visibility and the shape of the building and everything about it," she said. "I wanted it to be an ice cream parlor, but it wasn't for rent, and I went into the records, and I found out who owned the building, and I sent him a letter telling him how much I liked the building and how much I would love to be in there and have my ice cream parlor in there. And he said, "Well, my daughter's in there now and she's not paying rent, so you can rent the building."

That was February of 1995. Mazzetti Olson wanted to open that summer, but construction took longer than planned. Often, she'd be working in there all day painting and decorating, and random people would stop in to chat.

"They came in at all hours of the day to tell me what a bad location it was," she said, with a chuckle.

By the time construction was finished, it was October. She was disappointed to have missed summer—peak ice cream season—but looking back on it, she's grateful.

"Opening in October was actually a godsend," she said. "We got to work out all the kinks and figure out how everything worked. Pretty much by the following March and April, we started to get really busy, and our business kind of took off from there."

Maraline “Mimi” Mazzetti Olson, front and center, with her staff back in the day.

In 2003, her husband, Kurt, chose to join the business when the company he worked for moved to San Jose. “The shop was doing really well, and he had the option to move down to the South Bay or commute or work at the shop. And he chose to work at the shop. That allowed me to spend more time with our children. I was raising the boys, and Kurt ended up working at the shop all the time, and he made the ice cream for a good 10 years.”

This year, their son Carter moved back to Sebastopol to join the business. “He is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York,” Mazzetti Olson said. “He has a business degree from there, along with his being a chef.”

The flavor game

People are more adventurous when it comes to ice cream flavors these days, but Mazzetti Olson said, “When I first opened in ’95, people were pretty conservative with ice cream flavors. I made a lot of stuff that was interesting and good, but it didn’t really sell very well. So you have to make a decision. I’m gonna make really good ice cream, but you have to make ice cream that sells so that you can move ice cream and pay your bills.”

She stopped making the outliers—like roasted-corn ice cream, rice pudding ice cream, sweet potato pecan ice cream—and concentrated on more popular flavors, like rich, super-high-quality versions of butter pecan, peppermint stick, local strawberry, Deep Dark Secret and more.

From the beginning, Mimi’s Mud was their best seller and remains so today. Over the years, she pushed Sebastopol’s palate a little wider with flavors like Ginger, Lavender and some exotic sorbets. When gourmet ice cream producers went way out on a limb in 2018-2019—with flavors like Golden Beet Saffron, Blue Cheese, Prosciutto, and Peanut Butter Curry—she didn’t join them but she just pushed the envelope a little more with black sesame, Olive Oil and Cajeta Swirl (a goat cheese ice cream).

Just some of the flavors that Screamin' Mimi's is scooping this week. (From their website)

Has she ever made an ice cream that she thought was going to be really good, but turned out terrible? Just one.

"In 30 years, I've only thrown out one ice cream: it was fresh Kiwi ice cream—because the acid in the Kiwi just soured the milk."

After all these years, what's her favorite flavor at Screamin' Mimi's?

“Well, Mimi’s Mud is kind of hard not to be my favorite, because it’s the reason I’m so successful,” she said, “But my actual favorite flavor to eat is either Galaxy (a chocolate chip ice cream) or Vanilla Swiss Almond.

The pandemic challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed Screamin’ Mimi’s. Mazzetti Olson returned from a trip to New York just four days before California shut down.

“When I woke up that morning and I heard that Governor Newsom had decided to shut stuff down, I told my husband, ‘This is going to be so much longer than two weeks.’ We immediately went to, like, ‘What are we going to do with all this ice cream?’

They decided to pack it up into pints for take away. “Up until that point, we had never really sold pints. So during the first few months of COVID, we transitioned into more of a takeout pint business. When we did that, we had to buy a lot of new equipment. We have a ridiculously small space, and so it had to spill out into the front part of the shop.”

During the pandemic, they also built a little take-out stall out front where people could order ice cream cones. They sold pints out of their back door.

“We were only closed 21 days out of the entire two and a half years, which is amazing,” Mazzetti Olson said.

She credited both of her sons for helping the business through this challenging time.

So many businesses suffered during the shutdown, but Screamin’ Mimi’s thrived. Mazzetti Olson said she felt guilty about that sometimes, but she said, “I was really reassured by customers, over and over and over again, about how thankful they were that we were open.”

Their pint business continues to thrive. Though the front stall is gone, the other modifications they made to their building during the pandemic remain, something some customers have complained about. The good news is that will be changing sometime in the next two years.

“We have purchased a building, and we are going to be moving our production there,” she said. “That will cause a whole bunch of changes at this shop, but ultimately, this shop will resume to being more open and having more space for customers.”

The charm and challenge of a teenage workforce

Screamin’ Mimi’s is run in part on the indefatigable energy of teenagers. The store has provided many local teens with their first job.

“At this point, I’ve probably had about 700 employees,” Mazzetti Olson said. “The kids that end up working for me for a long time, it’s a unique person, you know? It’s a kid who is really self-motivated, has a lot of enthusiasm, and likes to stay busy.”

In many ways, it’s a demanding job.

“They are engaged with the customer the entire time the customer is there. They’re constantly working. If they’re not taking your order or scooping your ice cream or serving your ice cream, they’re doing all the prep work that goes into making the ice cream. They’re baking stuff or creating some of our ingredients, or they’re cleaning the shop or washing dishes or cleaning up a spill out front. So there’s really not a lot of downtime at all…I used to describe it as ‘It’s a complete opposite of a video store employee.’”

One of the skills Mazzetti Olson said she teaches kids is to leave their problems at home.

“Getting an employee—a young person—to really understand that they leave their problems at the door, and when they’re at work, they’re at work, and to have that be a safe space for them and that they can enjoy what they’re doing and not worry about the other things that are bothering them in their life. That’s a really fun thing to get a kid past that—like carrying the burden of everything that’s bothering a teenager with them all day—to get them to release that and just be at work and enjoy being at work and getting along with everybody they work with.”

She’s also noticed a change in the teenagers who, throughout the pandemic, spent a couple of years stuck in the house, masked in public and attending online classes.

“Suddenly, I have to remind them to look at the customer, make eye contact, smile, say hello, greet them…it was a really huge adjustment in my training to suddenly have to add in common courtesy and basic socialization skills.”

On the other hand, she said, “I feel so fortunate to have had all the wonderful young people who have worked for me in the past that have made it possible so that I’m not there 24/7.”

A job well done

Screamin’ Mimi’s was given the Hall of Fame award by the Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce at this year’s Community Awards.

When Community Awards co-host Melena Moore explained why they’d been chosen for this award, this is what she said: “For the past 30 years, they have been more than just an ice cream shop to our families. They’ve employed our local youth, not only during the summertime, but year-round. The amount of organizations and youth fundraisers they have supported cannot even be listed. They donate to any school that makes a request, as well as 4H, Rotary Clubs, Interact, the Senior Center. They’ve been right there for everybody from the very beginning.”

They’ve also done Screamin’ Mimi’s Pint for Pint Blood Drive for years.

Surrounded by her husband Kurt (right) and son Carter (left), Maraline “Mimi” Mazzetti Olson accepted the Hall of Fame award for Screamin’ Mimi’s. (Photo by Laura Hagar Rush)

At the Community Awards, Kurt Olson thanked his wife for what she created.

“The first person I need to thank is Maraline, what she’s brought to this town—what I get to see and experience, and we all get to experience: It’s a grandfather and a granddaughter coming to the shop and them sharing an ice cream cone. Literally millions and millions of memories like that over the last 30 years have been created because of what she created.”

Mazzetti Olson is proud of what she and her family have built over the years.

“I am really, really proud of the shop and I’m proud of its success,” she said. “I do feel like a lot of my personality and my quality control is very much a part of the success of the shop, but without my husband, Kurt, and every single kid who has ever worked at the shop, Mimi’s would not exist.”

Come to the party!

Mimi’s is celebrating their 30th anniversary this afternoon, Saturday, Oct. 18, from noon to 5 pm. Come say hello, try a special anniversary sundae and help celebrate their 30th year in Sebastopol.

Become a Sebastopol Times paid subscriber. John Sappington did, and here's why: "It's an important source of information and crucial in maintaining a shared sense of community."

Subscribe

20 Likes·
2 Restacks

Discussion about this post

John Namkung

Oct 18*Edited*

When I asked Maraline for a gift certificate to raffle off at a golf tournament dinner to raise funds for Ukrainian refugees a couple of years ago, she readily agreed and on top of that, she generously offered to donate ice cream for the 150 people at the dinner. (I didn't even ask.) When I announced during the dinner that we would be serving ice cream from Screamin' Mimi's in another room after the entree, most diners left their meals and made a beeline for the ice cream.

They are truly deserving of the award, and more!

LIKE (3)

REPLY

SHARE

Nancy Hair

Oct 18

Everyone who comes to visit wants to go to Mimi's. Places like this....not franchises and chains....are what makes Sebastopol so special. Please let's keep it that way.

LIKE (2)

REPLY

SHARE

4 more comments...