

Daily flavors: Twenty-four. Twenty-three of the flavors remain constant—among them chocolate, Just Java, and strawberry—but Libowsky makes one special concoction each day. He maps out selections a month at a time, then e-mails or faxes a flavor forecast to regular customers. Anything goes at Milwaukee Joe's. Since he opened his first store in 1995, Libowsky has created some 350 different flavors, including baklava, strawberries Romanoff, and coffee crème brûlée. Those partial to one particular flavor can say so at the store's website, then they'll get an e-mail whenever it's being made.

Most popular: Triple chocolate. Libowsky's technical explanation? "It's incredibly gooey."

The kids' report: Nine-year-old James favored triple chocolate while younger brother Henry thought cookies and cream was tops. Six-year-old Grace went wild for cotton candy flavor, as did five-year-old Joseph and his kid sister J.J. Four-year-old Claire, Grace's sister, had eyes only for the neon-blue Disco Lives! flavor. Libowsky says that Disco Lives! is a perennial kid favorite, thanks to a flavor similar to Fruity Pebbles cereal, but it has a following with adults, too. One downside: "It turns everything it touches blue," says Libowsky, "and everything stays blue for days."

The big kids' report: Kathryn, whose four-year-old son, Will, sat on her knee and happily smeared Disco Lives! on his face, gave a thumbs up to mint chocolate chip. —*June Naylor*

Dolce & Freddo ~ Houston

Opened in 1985, Dolce & Freddo has been around long enough to lose some of its continental edge and acquire the feeling of a neighborhood hangout. Families from the upscale West University area

gather outside on the wooden deck, where the tables are shaded by giant umbrellas, or they settle indoors into metal chairs around marble-topped tables. Kids chow European-style ice cream sundaes with tiny plastic shovels, and their parents wash down white-chocolate-chip cones with Italian designer coffee.

Daily flavors: Up to 30, including 10 sorbets and as many as 20 ice creams. Dolce & Freddo always stocks the trinity of ice cream favorites—vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry—as well as a number of flavors aimed at sophisticated palates. Among them: zabione, croccantino al rum, and bacio, a blend of imported hazelnut concentrate and chocolate mousse ice cream sure to please those who lace their lattes with flavored syrups.

Most popular: Tiramisu, with cocoa powder sprinkled on top.

The kids' report: Eight-year-old Emma proved that a person can become a caffeine fiend at any age as she favored the cappuccino gelato over the chocolate mousse gelato. Nine-year-old Lily, a traditionalist, preferred plain old chocolate.

The big kids' report: Lily's mom, Tessie, knew why chocolate is a best-seller after the first bite, and so did I. —*William Albright*

Hank's ~ Houston

Hank's Ice Cream Parlor resides in the shadows of the Reliant Astrodome and Reliant Stadium, which has allowed husband-and-wife owners Hank and Okemah Wiggins to carve out a couple of prized market niches. When ticket-holders' cars were waiting to get into the parking lot when the Stadium opened in 2002, Hank's beat the stadium concessionaires to the punch by selling its famous

After much slurping, a melted, multihued mess covered several tabletops.

KENNON EVETT



Four sophisticated ladies savor European-style ice cream sundaes at Houston hangout Dolce & Freddo while the big kids look on.