

Ladles Will Bowl You Over

It all started with a Texas road trip conversation. Suzie Allen (founder) and her husband were discussing how awesome a soup restaurant with multiple flavor options would be. They spent several years planning how to make it a reality. Allen drew up the logo--the word "Ladles" in a black serif font; the lower case "d" in the middle tantalizingly dripping with red soup.

Fast forward to the present time. Ladles is five years into operations, and has six locations: Bees Ferry, Coosaw Creek, Downtown Summerville, Kiawah's Freshfields Village, Mount Pleasant, and James Island. The James Island location opened in the Queensborough strip mall at the end of October. This was great timing as Charleston's colder temperatures are settling in. Terri Owens, one of Allen's sisters, manages this location. They grew up here in Charleston, in a military family of 6; she says they ate soup at meals, all year round.

Originally, staple soups and old family recipes were served. With chefs like Jason Dalter, who now runs Summerville's store, they've generated their own recipes. Allen says they have at least 400 recipes for soup, and about 100 are in heavy rotation. Alongside classic staples like chicken noodle and loaded potato, there is a gluten-free turkey chili, and vegetarian options like tomato basil and garden vegetable. The specials always have a vegetarian option, too. Salads include garden, house, and chef. Specials change weekly. As summer arrives, more cold soups (i.e., gazpacho, cucumber dill, carrot ginger) and salads are incorporated into the menu. Hot soup is always available, any time of year.

The night before each workday, each Ladles posts its specials on their Facebook page, for example, Ladles-Soups-James-Island in the Search field will take you to theirs. The next morning around 8, the kitchen is buzzing with ten big pots on the stove. By 11, the soups are ready for the warmers near the register. Customers order from an overhead

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chalkboard menu, they can see and sample each soup below it. Each bowl is a hearty 16 ounces. If it too hard to pick just one, the sampler option offers 5 ounces of each flavor. A “combo” is a bowl of soup and a half sandwich or a salad. Right now, you can get two combos for \$15 with iced teas included. Every Thursday at Ladles, children eat free with the purchase of an adult meal.

At the end of each day--8pm Monday-Saturday and 5pm Sundays--any soup that is left over is stored in quart size containers. Each one has a shelf-life of 3 months, and it is available for sale at any location; it's ideal for homebound individuals and/or those on limited incomes. This fall, some frozen soup was shipped to the Northeast for Hurricane Sandy relief efforts; other locations have sold the leftover soup to customers, and sent the proceeds to Sandy relief. Julie Dyke, the manager at Mt. Pleasant, helped coordinate this effort. Ladles also supports breast cancer awareness and their neighborhood high schools. Owens says James Island has been very good to them in their first month of business, and they look forward to giving back more in 2013 and beyond. James Island will be the first Ladles to offer call-in orders for pickup sometime next year.

Both Terri and Suzie say the best part of the food business is the people. Terri says seeing customer's faces when they sample soups is especially rewarding. Suzie says she's never worked this hard in her life, but they have a great staff and she has really loved every part of making Ladles a reality. The next Ladles will be opening in Buffalo NY.

Franchise information is available on the website at ladlessoups.com. Ladles is open Monday through Saturday at 11am until 8pm, on Sundays they close at 5pm.