

# Ice cream in a machine

By: **CRISSA SHOEMAKER DEBREE** (Tue, Aug/22/2006)

Before most kids their age had figured out where they wanted to go to college, Shawn and Dan Kilcoyne were on their way to success.

While their classmates were worried about tests, the brothers were growing a business selling flash-frozen ice cream.

Today, Shawn, 28, and Dan, 23, own close to 100 vending machines that dispense Mini Melts, treats cryogenically frozen into little chunks of melt-in-your-mouth ice cream.

They've come a long way from their first business plan, written before either graduated high school. But they've kept the grand dreams that first led them into the ice cream business.

"Our goal is to be the biggest ice cream vending company in the mid-Atlantic region," said Dan, who lives in Philadelphia.

The Kilcoynes had their first taste of the flash-frozen ice cream during a trip to Florida. Shawn was 18, Dan, 14. They enjoyed it so much they wrote a 25-page business plan and sent it off to maker Dippin' Dots.

Within a few months, the brothers were selling Dippin' Dots at Father Judge High in Philadelphia.

Soon after, they opened their first kiosk at the Neshaminy Mall in Bensalem. Over five years, they opened 20 Dippin' Dots locations.

"I used to say, even when Dan was a sophomore, they were going to go far," said the Rev. Joseph Campellone, the school's president. He was chaplain when the Kilcoynes were students. "They both had the same type of desire and commitment that you just don't see in today's world with youth."

Shawn and Dan can't take all the credit for their success. Their parents, Patrick and Patricia, invested thousands of dollars and untold hours in their sons' business.

"Our goal is to make this the best investment our parents ever made," said Shawn, who lives in Middletown and is father to James, 3, and Katie, 6 months.

Their dreams almost came to an abrupt end in 2000, when Dippin' Dots changed its business plan from kiosk-based formats to franchises. The brothers said they would have had to pay \$200,000 over three years in franchise fees. They refused to sign the agreement.

Then came Mini Melts.

Founded by British businessman Tom Mosey in 1995, Mini Melts was a Dippin' Dots competitor. The Kilcoynes convinced Mosey to let them set up Mini Melts vending machines in the United States.

"We saw their numbers and they were very strong in the market," Mosey said. "As we got to see them personally and see their abilities, we were very impressed with that. The numbers spoke for themselves. And then we were fortunate enough to develop a personal relationship with them."

When Dippin' Dots sued Mini Melts for allegedly violating its patent, the brothers were named in the

lawsuit. Dan was just 18. Their parents took out a second mortgage to keep their businesses afloat, but one by one, they closed the Dippin' Dots kiosks they had worked so hard to build.

Mosey helped defend the Kilcoynes, and eventually the lawsuit was thrown out of court after a judge found that Dippin' Dots' creator had acquired his patent by fraud.

Because the pair had established contacts at malls and shopping centers throughout the area, they were able to start up their business again in two months, this time with Mini Melts. Neshaminy welcomed them back with open arms, and their first Mini Melts machine was in place at the mall near Sears.

The ice cream comes in a variety of flavors, costs \$3 a cup and includes a spoon.

Shawn and Dan continue to build their business. Their parents still play an important role — Dad stocks the machine and Mom does the books along with Shawn's wife, Shannon. Dan's girlfriend, Michele Whitworth, knows the machines almost as well as the brothers do.

They've created Mini Melts of America Inc., a vending machine business. They're hoping other people will sign on to open their own machines, each of which takes in, on average, \$2,000 a month.

"One thing Dan and I really want to do is help other people get in the business," Shawn said. "We have so much knowledge now, so much experience. We want to show people there's an alternative to franchising."

**Crissa Shoemaker DeBree can be reached at 215-949-4192 or [cshoemaker@phillyburbs.com](mailto:cshoemaker@phillyburbs.com).**

---

Article's URL:

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/147-08222006-701010.html>