

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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The Name is Overt, the Game is Yogurt: Take a Lick at Tisberry in Tisbury

By IVY ASHE

When Eric Johnson and his wife, Leslie, were trying to come up with a name for their new frozen yogurt shop, they were sure of one thing.

“We didn’t want the word ‘berry’ in the name,” Mr. Johnson said. After the recent success of Los Angeles-based yogurt chain Pinkberry, imitation shops popped up all over the country, many playing off the original moniker. The Johnsons were determined to be different.



Stella Habashi skips out of Tisberry as Nina and Zoe Listro follow with treats.

But after agonizing for more than a month, rejecting every name from Twisted Spoon to Yophoria (“like Euphoria . . .” explained Mr. Johnson”), Leslie finally hit upon the perfect solution for the most recent addition to the Vineyard Haven main drag: Tisberry. The berries are there, it’s true, but it really couldn’t have been helped.

The Johnsons’ venture into the yogurt business began in April, with, unsurprisingly, a visit to family in Los Angeles, and was finalized on July 1, when Tisberry opened for business in its current location on Cromwell street next to Riley’s Reads bookstore. The couple had originally planned to open a new branch of the clothing store Bryn Walker — Mrs. Johnson is the owner of the Edgartown boutique — in Mashpee as their latest business venture, but a taste of the tart dairy treat convinced them otherwise.

“The first time I tried it I was sold,” said Mr. Johnson. “It doesn’t weigh you down, it’s healthy and low-carb, low-calorie.”

“It’s a very well-differentiated product,” he continued, referring to frozen yogurt’s place in the dessert market alongside another more well-known summer delicacy. “I haven’t really viewed us as competition for ice cream.”



photo by IvyAche

Help yourself to toppings, fruit to nuts.

Frozen yogurt from Tisberry is made with pure milk, not cream. Because of this quality, it contains less fat — in the case of the plain tart variety, it contains no fat at all. The taste of the treat is at once familiar yet distinct. In the words of customer Paul Bailey, visiting with wife, Kerry, from Boston, “It tastes more like real yogurt.”

Tisberry serves four flavors of yogurt — plain tart is a standby, as is coconut, a customer favorite.

“That’s staying,” Mr. Johnson said, “because people would revolt.”

The other two flavors are apt to be anything from mango to vanilla to raspberry. After selecting a flavor, customers can choose from dozens of toppings, which include chopped kiwi, granola from the Scottish Bakehouse, mochi (Japanese rice cakes), crumbled Oreos, and, of course, those ever-present berries. Gummi Bears are especially popular among the younger crowd.

All of the yogurt transactions are carried out by an “unbelievable” group of employees, said Mr. Johnson. Behind the counter, he noted with pride, is “a pretty well-oiled machine.”

On the other side of the glass divider are bright colors and funky furniture, the better to welcome in fellow dairy lovers. For those wanting to take in the summer weather along with their yogurt, an outdoor patio beckons.



photo by IvyAche

Fat-Free frozen yogurt’s tart taste is worth the wait.

“We like the atmosphere,” said Olivia Gross of West Tisbury, relaxing on an orange couch with friend Amalie Tinus of Oak Bluffs. “

“It’s fun in here,” added Miss Tinus. “We love it.”

The Johnsons plan to keep Tisberry open throughout the summer, with limited hours until Thanksgiving. Mr. Johnson, however, is already thinking ahead to next season, hoping to incorporate organic yogurt into the menu — an experiment in organic this year proved too costly — as well as go more local with toppings.

What kind of toppings?

“We’d be getting in on the beginning of strawberry season,” said Mr. Johnson.

It can’t be helped.