

# SBJ

## Business Spotlight: Ride the Flavorwave

### In a second career, Jack and Donna Ewing join a mobile shaved ice franchise

By Sydni Moore | August 8, 2:12 p.m.

Missouri may be landlocked, but this summer many Springfield residents are riding a Flavorwave.

That's the name of Kona Ice Inc.'s self-serve syrup fountain on the sides of over 900 trucks. Kona franchisees dish out shaved ice as far south as Houston, Texas, as far north as Anchorage, Alaska, and in the Queen City, as of a few years ago.



In mid-2013, Chris and Cathy Cook introduced the Hawaiian-themed trucks to southern parts of Springfield, traveling nearly three hours from their base in Columbia. Through their franchise, dubbed Kona Ice COMO, the Cooks continue to serve Branson, Wheatland, Lake of the Ozarks and Jefferson City.

Florence, Kentucky-based Kona Ice started in 2007 with founder Tony Lamb



seeking a unique dessert experience. He considered ice cream trucks “creepy,” and after some creative brainstorming, Kona Ice was born, according to its website.

Jack and Donna Ewing more recently came into the franchise. With the Cooks making the drive to Springfield for events, such as birthday and graduation parties, the Ewings saw an opportunity to plant the franchise flag in the city.

“We got our truck on July 13, our business license on July 14 and served a church camp at 1 p.m. the same day,” Donna Ewing says.

The couple invested \$150,000 to buy into the franchise, including a single Kona truck – numbered 911 in the fleet. Their rights cover all of Springfield, except for the 65804 ZIP code, which the Cooks still hold.

“The truck’s been booked just about every day since we’ve had it,” Jack adds.

## **KONA ICE OF CENTRAL SPRINGFIELD**

**Owner:** Kona Ice Inc.

**Founded:** 2017

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**Services/Products:**  
Flavored shaved ice,  
special event rentals

**Employees:** 4

It certainly draws the eye, with vibrant colors and smiling cartoon penguins and crabs offering up a cup of Kona. Melodic favorites play to the tune of steel drums.

“We don’t really need to market a whole lot,” Jack says. “The truck does it for us.”

The Ewings spent a year hunting for a franchise before Jack came across the Kona Ice website in February.

“We looked at Firehouse Subs, Seattle’s Best Coffee and Mister Softee,” Jack says. “This one just stood out.”

Jack had just finished a long career as a fleet manager at Prime Trucking Inc. After 22 years working in a high-stress environment, Jack says he was ready for something fun.

“I saw this Kona Ice franchise at about 3 a.m., woke my wife up and said, ‘This is it. This is what I want to do,’” he recalls.

Now, the Ewings are living their small-business dream.

“We do pool parties. We do special events. We take the truck at any time, anywhere,” Jack says.

The Springfield-Greene County Park Board just approved the couple’s Kona truck for operation in the Sequiota and Nathanael Greene/Close Memorial parks. Already, they’ve been making frequent stops at area preschools, so the tots can enjoy a treat following a school day.

“They just love it,” Jack says. “You’ll have a group of kids coming out the door behind their teacher and all of a sudden you’ll see these little 2- to 5-year-olds starting to sway and dance to the music.”

Preschoolers at The Goddard School, 2238 W. Kingsley St., especially loved getting to pick out their own flavors, says Assistant Director Hali Hill.

“They enjoyed it so much, we actually decided to have them come once a month,” Hill says.

The truck’s 10 flavors cater to the health-conscious, including those with allergies.

“We’re Kosher; we’re also sugar-free and a 12-ounce serving is generally under 50 calories,” Jack says. “I hate to say it, but I eat it every day.”

Prices start at \$3. Shaved ice also is available in up to 22-ounce servings.

And, weirdly enough, it’s all chilled by the sun.

“We don’t need power. Our trucks are self-sufficient,” Jack says of the solar paneling atop the vehicles that ensure all ice stored inside is kept cool. “As we’re sitting here during the day, we’re recharging our batteries so we can keep going. We don’t need an ice machine. We can run our lights for a day without ever plugging into power.”

While the couple are just getting started, the market reception before their entry and their early sales have them already looking toward expansion.

“I could see us growing by another two to three units,” Jack says, noting they plan to partner with schools and participate in fundraisers.

They say they’ll follow the franchisor’s lead in donating thousands of dollars each year to local school groups, teams and community organizations. Donna says Kona corporate wants to have 1,000 trucks on the roads by next year.

According to Kona franchise materials, franchise fees are \$15,000 and royalties start at \$3,000 for the first five years in business and increase to \$4,000 in the eighth year and on.

“We just offer a different product,” Jack says. “It doesn’t matter how old you are. From the youngest to the oldest, help yourself.”