

**MAKING IT
IN NORTHERN
MICHIGAN**

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



Who knew they made it here?

BY CLARK MILLER

Hot summer days push as many as 2,000 ice cream lovers through Moomers' shop on North Long Lake Road. There are at least two good reasons for that: The award-winning ice cream is the perfect antidote to warmer temps and there are always new



flavors to try.

Started as a dairy farm nearly three decades ago by former first grade teacher Nancy Plummer and her husband Bob, the idea of making and selling ice cream seemed like a natural next step. Two of the Plummer's grown children, Jon and Becky, are now fully involved in the ice cream side of the family business.

Visitors to the store today can look out over the Plummer's steeply rolling, 80-acre farm and see the small herd of milk cows who help make Moomers so popular. A fun fact: The name



name "Moomers" came from Nancy, who had always called calves "moomers."

Jon Plummer said the name just stuck.

"Kids can pronounce it. They can remember it.

And kids are important in this business," he said. "It's turned out to be one of the best decisions they made. And it was done without branding or business experts."

Plummer said at first he wasn't sure about working so closely every day with family. But now he's completely engaged and can tick off many of the reasons why the business has prospered:

• **Create and sustain high-quality products.** "That comes first, of course."

- **Be there.** "Work your business. Always stay on top of what's going on."
- **Grow organically.** "Don't stretch yourself too thin. Make sure the cash flow is where it needs to be."
- **Understand your customers.** "We are in the people business. People remember how the experience made them feel."
- **Keep current.** "We just met with [Northwestern Michigan College] to see if they have some new ideas that would be good for our business."
- **Develop new products.** Experimentation, he said, "is pretty much endless."
- **Be bold.** It's OK to fail once in a while. "We tried asparagus ice cream and also a macaroni and cheese flavor. They were horrible. They went straight into the dumpster."

A big challenge for Moomers is the seasonal aspect of the business.

Half of yearly sales take place between June and August. Demand is so great, the staff – many of them young, first-time workers – expands to about 25. By comparison, in mid-winter, there's a skeletal crew of just five or six. To ease the seasonal swings, Moomers has increased the wholesale side of operations.

Another challenge surfaced with the enactment of the Food Safety Modernization Act in 2011, which Jon Plummer calls the "biggest food safety overhaul in 20 years." For Moomers, this meant ingredients like local berries have to come from inspected, documented sources.

But in typical fashion, he remains upbeat.

"It means we have more hoops to jump through, but on the other hand, it's good for customers," he said. "We know we're already doing it right when our food inspector comes here as a customer."