



# *12 Months of Sundaes*

**An old-fashioned ice cream cart becomes a much-loved amenity at the Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa.**

By Margaret Rose Caro



“Everyone loves ice cream, especially at the beach, so we designed an ice cream cart to be offered in guestrooms as well as poolside,” says David Cronin, director of F&B for the Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The menu is simple: root beer floats and ice cream sundaes with multiple toppings.



Poolside, about 50 sundaes are served in an hour by a server dressed in a 1950s soda jerk jacket and hat.

Since guests pay a premium for in-room dining, “we want to give them good reasons to do so,” says David Cronin, director of F&B for the oceanfront Harbor Beach Marriott Resort & Spa in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. “As a result of our two-year-old Living Room program, guests often say, ‘I could leave my room now, but I’d rather not.’”

A successful part of the program is the Ice Creamery. Available all day long, year-round, the interactive ice cream presentation makes it easy to delight everyone from single business travelers to families with kids. “Everyone loves ice cream, especially at the beach, so we designed an ice cream cart to be offered in guestrooms as well as poolside,” Cronin says.

The menu is simple. “We offer root beer floats and ice cream sundaes made with Häagen-Dazs vanilla and chocolate ice cream,” says Cronin. “Toppings include crushed Oreos, Heath Bars, M&Ms, and Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups; nuts; multi-colored and chocolate sprinkles; whipped cream; and cherries.”

In the guestroom, root beer floats are served in tall frosted glasses, and sundaes are served in china bowls. Around the pool, disposable plastic glasses and bowls are used for safety purposes. And the server’s uniform—a white, 1950s soda jerk jacket and hat—adds extra pizzazz.

The Ice Creamery is open for an hour a day at the pool, from noon until 1 p.m. or 2 to 3 p.m. “Within that hour, we usually sell 50 or 60 sundaes,” says Cronin. “But this is not just about making money. It’s about creating excitement, bringing life to a beautiful location. We definitely don’t want to gouge people for the novelty of the concept. We always charge \$5, period. If a guest wants something extra, like a banana, we ask them to wait a few minutes while we run inside or downstairs to find it.”

### **MAKING IT WORK**

“First, we had to get buy-in from staff,” says Cronin. Initially, some thought it was just more work. But, because of the wow factor, now everyone is behind it. Four or five naturally outgoing people have been trained to run it. Restaurant Director Joseph LaFleur conducts the training, which involves sanitation, portion control, proper sprinkling and scooping—and a reminder that the signature uniform be worn at all times, no exceptions. “Consistency is always the biggest challenge in our business,” Cronin emphasizes.

The next step was to design the cart, a mobile freezer that can easily be wheeled through corridors and into guestrooms. “We talked to an ice cream company to learn what works best,” says Cronin. “We knew, for example, we wanted eight wells, a bell, the ability for the freezer to stay cold while unplugged for use at poolside, and we had to make sure the wheels wouldn’t come off.”

Cronin's team worked for several months with C. Nelson Manufacturing, Oak Harbor, Ohio, to develop a cart costing close to \$3,000. They created a cart that is both functional and artistic. Scheduled maintenance involves periodic cleaning and defrosting, which are done in the room service kitchen.

### **ADDED VALUE**

The Ice Creamery followed the hotel's rolling cocktail cart, created for both business and leisure guests to enjoy an in-room beverage. Instead of offering the drink on a typical serving tray, a Marriott cocktail concierge wheels a cart into the guestroom and creates a beverage of choice on the spot.

"The Living Room program was designed to elevate in-room dining and add something different to the obligatory VIP check-in amenities," says Cronin.

As for the ice cream cart, with a large orange flag and familiar jingle, it is a welcome sight and sound. "Returning guests often ask about it," says Cronin. "Although it's not a Marriott initiative at this point, other properties are looking at it." During tough times, the ice cream cart offers an excellent way to chill.

*Margaret Rose Caro is editor of HOTEL F&B.*