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Staff/Anthony Stalcup

Randy Elias and Scott Paton, co-owners of Menchie's Frozen Yogurt in Acworth, pose in their shop. The self-serve, pay-by-weight customized concept allows customers to choose their flavor and toppings.

## With a cherry on top

### Frozen yogurt shop allows customers to pick flavor, toppings

By Donna Espy  
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Scott Paton knows a good business opportunity when he sees one.

So when he heard the frozen yogurt craze was sweeping the country and had enjoyed a 700 percent growth in sales, he wanted to try his hand at it. Last week, Paton and his business partner, Randy Elias, opened a Menchie's in Acworth at 3348 Cobb Parkway, becoming part of the fastest-growing frozen yogurt franchise in the country.

Menchie's, which is the nickname of company founder Danna Caldwell, started in California and has been a favorite spot among Hollywood celebrities. Paton said he hopes his store becomes a favorite gathering spot for local families, churches and schools. He said the self-serve, pay-by-weight customized concept is very different from other yogurt businesses.

"Kids always love the mixing and matching of different flavors and toppings," said Paton, 34, adding that there are 16 flavors

of yogurt to choose from, including eight swirled into a mix. "The creative self-serve process seems to bring out the kid in everyone."

Customers help themselves to yogurt flavors ranging from cookies and cream to pomegranate and more than 30 toppings, including candy pieces, fresh fruits such as kiwi and strawberries, granolas, nuts, and hot fudge. They also offer no-sugar-added yogurt and nondairy for those who are lactose intolerant.

After a customer is done mixing and topping, the bowl is priced at 44 cents an ounce, and Paton said most creations come out between \$3 and \$5.50 a bowl, although adding a waffle bowl is extra.

Kennesaw State University freshman Kate Stevick loved the fresh fruit selection to top off her yogurt. "I like that you can choose the amount you want, and there's a good variety of flavors," said Stevick, who stopped in after classes.

Fellow KSU student Parker Sawyer said he likes frozen yogurt better than ice cream

because it's a healthier choice. "There are a lot of yogurt places opening around here, but I like the variety of flavors and toppings here," Sawyer said.

The 2,800-square-foot Menchie's store is decorated in bright pink and green colors and includes two separate party rooms for birthdays or book clubs. The rooms include a staff member if needed to coordinate the festivities. There is also an outdoor patio for seating in good weather.

Paton, a Woodstock resident, said it has been non-stop business. "This is a great fit for this community," Paton said.

And he should know. He and Elias own the Moe's Southwest Grill at the other end of the shopping center. After being in Acworth five years, he knows the clientele, the school and church groups, and many of the families.

The pair also owns a Moe's in Cartersville at Joe Frank Harris Parkway and Church Street. They met while attending Northern Arizona University in the late 1990s. They hope to contribute to their communities by

partnering with local schools in fundraising activities as well as with neighborhood nonprofits.

Paton's background is in hotel and restaurant management, and he learned the ropes in the kitchen of an American institution — Waffle House. His partner, Elias, 35, a Smyrna resident, majored in small business management, and said the secret to their success is following the four Cs: consistency, capital, cleanliness and concept. "Consistency means that, if you go to a Moe's in Hawaii, you're going to get the same product as right here in Acworth."

Elias said their Menchie's location had a soft opening last Friday, which was one of the best in the company's three-year history. A ribbon-cutting will take place Feb. 25 with Acworth Mayor Tommy Allegeed doing the honors. There will also be raffles and free giveaways of Menchie's T-shirts, jewelry and hats.

Menchie's has already expanded internationally as well, opening stores in Canada, Japan, Mexico and Australia this year. For more information, visit [www.menchie.com](http://www.menchie.com).