

## eat &amp; drink

## CONE OF DESTINY

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

It was her birthright, a rainbow cone. Generations of the Sapp family had been raised on the stuff, and Lynn Sapp, future third-generation owner of Beverly's Original Rainbow Cone, should be no different. Her grandfather (and the founder) Joseph Sapp opened the Original Rainbow Cone in 1926 near the corner of 92nd Place and Western Avenue, serving multiple generations of Chicagoans a curious combo of five flat slices—not scoops—of chocolate, strawberry, Palmer House (vanilla studded with walnuts and cherries) and pistachio ice cream and orange cream sherbet combined in to a rainbow of layers smushed on top of a wafer-style ice cream cone.

But Lynn ignored the famous cone for six years. Her grandfather tried mightily to get her to claim her birthright as a child. He cut cones in half and tried to feed them to her dolls. But Lynn would have none of it. She only wanted a chocolate cone. “That had to kill the poor man [that his granddaughter wouldn’t try it],” she said. Though Lynn wouldn’t try the cone, it already had become a South Side sensation, a Chicago culinary tradition alongside getting a burger at Top Notch, a slice at Vito & Nick’s or an Italian beef at Al’s.

It wasn’t always that way. Before he opened his stand, Joseph was an orphan and lived on a work farm, an early form of foster care. The few pennies he had, he spent on ice cream. One of his early discoveries was that mixing chocolate and vanilla made the cone better. When he launched Rainbow Cone in 1926, he combined not two flavors, but five. Rainbow Cone was founded during the Depression, when a full meal cost 10 cents. He sold his inventive cone for 13 cents, or two for 25 cents (today, they range from \$3.39 for a small to \$4.99 for a large). The Palmer House flavor (named not after Potter Palmer’s famous hotel in the Loop, but after a place he knew as a child in New York) was created because Joseph felt the fruits and nuts in the vanilla blend added a heartiness to the mix and created more value for someone who might otherwise spend their money on a meal.

Sundays became the busiest days, because families visiting nearby cemeteries on 111th Street would stop by on their way home for a cone. During World War II, Joseph installed a



The Original Rainbow Cone JOEL WINTERMANTLE FILE PHOTO FOR THE TRIBUNE

## the essentials

UPPING YOUR CHICAGO RESTAURANT CRED ONE BITE AT A TIME

short wave radio and Rainbow Cone became a community gathering place where people could listen to the news and share information about their loved ones fighting abroad.

The original Rainbow Cone was a tiny stand located on a part of Western Avenue that was still unpaved dirt road. Lynn’s father Robert built the pink stucco building that she operates out of today across from the original stand in the ’70s. “My father went to Florida and saw stucco, which wasn’t familiar in Chi-

cago. He liked the swirls and the texture and thought it looked like ice cream, which is why he chose that style,” she said.

Lynn worked in the business as a child. “I was in the back when I was 2 years old,” she said. “When I was a teenager, we wore white dresses as a uniform. Now I design the T-shirts the employees wear, because they wouldn’t ever wear a dress,” she added.

She took over the business fully in 1986 and spread Rainbow Cone’s stellar reputation



Original Rainbow Cone at 92nd and Western THE DAILY SOUTHTOWN FILE PHOTO



Rainbow Cone at the Taste of Chicago TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/TRIBUNE FILE

## ORIGINAL RAINBOW CONE

9233 S. Western Ave. 773-238-7075

**Looks like:** A Spanish mission-style Barbie mansion**Sounds like:** The crunch of wafer-style ice cream cones**Smells like:** Vanilla, chocolate and cherries

beyond the Beverly neighborhood by operating a kiosk at the Taste of Chicago for the past 28 years, a tradition she’s taking a break from in 2015. “I love the Taste, but it takes a lot of planning. We have to start in February to make the portion cups and get enough ice cream made,” she said. “We’re taking a step back this year and directing our attentions on growing the business in other ways. My biggest goal is to be open for the 100th year anniversary. We’re almost there.”

Another of Lynn’s inventions was a rainbow cone cake featuring a single layer cake topped with all five ice creams and frosting. “A lot of my friends were getting married and I couldn’t afford gifts, so I taught myself to make a cake and gave that instead.” Maybe the most important change for her happened when she was six years old: She finally gave in to her grandfather and exchanged her favorite chocolate cone for the rainbow cone. “I loved it. After that, I alternated between that and chocolate,” she said. “Now, I’m not supposed to have ice cream. My cholesterol is a little high, but those cones are like crack cocaine. I can’t stay away.”

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