Thomas Walker, MBA
Regional Director

Bozeman Regional SBDC

Mountain Fresh Italian Ice

Bozeman, MT



"Having a knowledgeable, experienced person to bounce ideas and plans off of is, by itself, very valuable. The resources Tom has been able to provide, such as an introduction to Dave Allard at the MMEC when it came time for a manufacturing goal, have been key. Tom even attended a potentially contentious client meeting with me as support, which was of great comfort and truly appreciated."
Derek Ivester, *Owner*

Derek Ivester moved to Montana over seven years ago with his family and began his teaching career. During the summer months, with an initial $4,000 personal investment in an ice cream cart and umbrella, Derek and his family began slinging Italian ice to make ends meet. Derek's Italian ice is dairy-free, low in calories, free of all major allergens, and uses plant-derived colors. With its popularity, Derek quickly saw the opportunity for more than one Italian ice cart. Derek scooped his all-natural Italian ice at Farmer's Markets and festivals, and continuously put everything he could back into the business. He added a second cart, then a trailer, and eventually purchased manufacturing equipment and packaging. With a growing request for access to Mountain Fresh Italian Ice in stores, Derek signed a distribution deal with Quality Foods Distributingin 2018. As a solo entrepreneur with no background in manufacturing, Derek knew he needed help.

Tom Walker, Bozeman SBDC Regional Director, provided support to Derek and his growing company. Tom was able to help Derek work through a capacity analysis to determine that he could make 1,200 units a day, which inturn would support new customers in the wholesale area. Together, Tom and Derek evaluated potential wholesale channels and distributors for possible expansion. Derek knew he needed an experienced person to explore ideas and check progress, as well as a person to hold him accountable. Additionally, Derek has been able to build on the Bozeman SBDC connections by partnering with the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center for food safety education for his employees. Tom also provided support and advice to Derek during client meetings.

With Tom's help, Mountain Fresh Italian Ice negotiated a contract with MSU Food Services to start offering their products in the dining halls and MSU retail locations. Mountain Fresh Italian Ice successfully launched into several grocery store chains with Quality Food Distributors of Bozeman. The company continues to grow in a way that will create jobs in the Gallatin Valley and potentially beyond. In addition to using compostable disposables, recyclable materials, and responsible supply chains, Mountain Fresh Italian Ice is dedicated to their community. They sponsor local non-profits like the Fork and Spoon Cafe, LaMotte School Foundation, and the Raptor Center.