

POPS drink shop

Rare soda sales have sparkled more than manager expected

By Steve Lackmeyer
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ARCADIA — Consider Marty Doepke your friendly bartender. Hit him with a request for an obscure drink that's only native to the West Coast or some other faraway place and he'll likely fill the bill.

Of course at POPS the drink of choice comes in at least a half dozen colors, a few hundred brands, and contains no alcohol.

After just one month in business, POPS has sold more than 45,000 specialty sodas not typically found in Oklahoma. Add to that figure sales of another 15,000 regular fountain drinks — brands like Coke and Dr. Pepper — and the amount of soda sold at POPS would match sales at about a dozen sold-out NBA games at the Ford Center.

Doepke, manager of POPS, knew before it opened on Aug. 7 that the iconic cafe, convenience store and gas station along Route 66 would be a hit with both locals and travelers. Built by billionaire Aubrey McClendon, POPS is an unrivaled tribute to soda pop that offers hundreds of specialty brands and features a 66-foot-high pop bottle at its entrance along Route 66.

Doepke anticipated selling 3,000 specialty sodas a week. Instead, the store sold 13,000 the first week it was open.

"At first it was difficult to meet supply and demand," Doepke said. "But we're catching up now. Obviously our projections were a bit off. But response couldn't have been better — it's all very exciting."

The guest book hints at POPS' worldwide customer base. Entries include visitors from Austria, Norway, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan. And pretty much every state is represented — a showing Doepke credits to stories on CNN, CNBC and the Today Show.

"Everyday I've met people who drove here specifically to see POPS — because they saw it on CNN or The Today Show," Doepke said. "They've come from Rogers, Ark., Wichita Falls, Texas, and Joplin, Mo., just because they've seen it, heard about it, and wanted to see it for themselves."

Customers like David Tate have discovered a weeknight is preferable to arriving on a weekend. During Labor Day weekend, he skipped buying a burger at the cafe and instead left with a mix of grape soda and root beer. The Norman resident made the trek again on a Thursday and was delighted to discover no two-hour wait at the cafe.

His order? A half-pound cheeseburger and fries. "I'll come back even on a Saturday for the grape soda,"

Tate said. "But I think I'll limit my dining excursions to Thursday nights."

Steve Broudy and his son Jake, 8, strategically chose a weeknight to visit after encountering large crowds on previous weekend stops.

"About a week ago, we just came for dessert," Broudy said. "The first time we came, it was about an hour wait. But we wanted to see what the big deal was, why it was so busy. We live about five minutes from here, in Luther, and it's a big deal for us because we don't have a big selection of places to eat."

Doepke isn't releasing sales figures, and the first sales tax remittance to Arcadia won't be reflected in the town's finances for another month or so.

But the opening of POPS comes at a price for Arcadia — local police have had to provide traffic control on busy weekends, especially the Labor Day holiday.

Doepke is planning to show his appreciation with a special day for Arcadia leaders.

Tate said he has relatives in Idaho who saw recent coverage of POPS on CNN and they are eager to make the trek when they visit him during the Christmas holidays.

"We won't be coming on the weekend," Tate said. "A Thursday night just like this will work just as well. But we might have to make an extra trip to haul back the grape soda."

