

# Scooter's Coffee 'Scoots' to 100th location

In the world of high-quality coffee, Don and Linda Eckles have found there's more than one way to fill a cup.

The co-founders of Scooter's Coffee realized years ago that their business would not emulate another coffee seller. "Starbucks has 15,000 stores," Don Eckles said, "and the next closest chain has 500 locations. We decided the only way to compete with Starbucks was to not be Starbucks. To us, that meant the highest quality coffee in the world, served through the drive-thru window."

among customers that it led to the creation of Scooter's own happy face family.

Some 15 years after opening their first store, the Eckles' business model is working—Scooter's is one of Omaha's most successful and visible companies with more than 40 drive-thru locations in the city. Because Scooter's franchises, you can find them in seven states. The 100th Scooter's will open at Rockbrook Village in Omaha within the next two weeks.

Such growth has allowed the company to experiment with other concepts, such as expanding the menu several years ago to include smoothies, which now represent 28 percent of sales. They also offer self-serve frozen yogurt at 15 locations.

"We are not a coffeehouse business...we are a drive-thru coffee business," Don Eckles explained. "Adding self-serve frozen yogurt at some locations allows us to tap into a new market that serves families. Sometimes, parents who bring their children into the stores

for frozen yogurt end up getting coffee for themselves. But even in those "co-concept" stores, our focus is still serving the world's best coffee through the drive-thru."

While recognizing the success of the sit-down side of business, the Eckles maintain their focus will always be on drive-thru service, where Scooter's customers

can "scoot in and scoot out" with their coffee. While living in California, the Eckles witnessed the introduction of the drive-thru coffee concept and realized its potential for a successful business model.

"One day I saw this guy building a shack in a parking lot, and he was going to sell coffee from it," Don Eckles recalled. "I thought 'This guy's onto something' and after he opened, I'd sit and watch, counting the cars. We decided that's what we would do when we moved back home to Omaha."

When they returned to the Midwest, their initial challenge was finding a location. "I was calling landlords and telling them I wanted to build a kiosk for selling coffee in their parking lot," Eckles said. "It took a LONG time to convince them."

The first Scooter's drive-thru was opened at 2402 Cornhusker Road in Bellevue in 1998. The first "drive-thru only" kiosk was built at Millard Plaza in southwest Omaha in 1999. The first store was built with cash. After that, financing for stores was provided by First National Bank.

"From the bank's perspective, we knew we had to have looked crazy," Don Eckles acknowledged, "but they were right there. Since then, they've continued to meet our lending needs—even in a recession when we were still building stores First National Bank was lending us money. It was tough for businesses to get money during that stretch, but they continued to lend to us."

Scooter's even shares space with First National Bank at its 12th and Howard location in the heart of the Old Market.



**Amy Dryden serves a smoothie at the 72nd & Cornhusker Scooter's**

Today, the company roasts, packages and ships coffee from its 43,000-square-foot corporate facility in Omaha. Scooter's company operations division and its franchisees are building about 10 to 20 new stores a year, with plans to build 25 in 2013. The company is registered to sell franchises in most states, with franchisees looking to expand into markets throughout the country.

Scooter's once showed up in an online story about, what the writer referred to as, "the most annoying businesses in Omaha." Scooter's, and another well-known national brand, were the two businesses in the category. Scooter's was determined to be the most annoying because the writer "once went by a corner that didn't have one of the other retailer's stores on it," implying that there is a Scooter's on every corner. Smiling, Eckles said that, "while that's not quite the case, it is a nice goal."

[www.scooterscoffeehouse.com](http://www.scooterscoffeehouse.com)



**Don Eckles, co-founder of Scooter's Coffee**

The Eckles figured there were plenty of potential customers who wanted high-quality coffee and other drinks, speedy service, a clean store and a big smile. Creating a welcoming atmosphere by placing happy face stickers on every drink was one of the personal touches Linda Eckles introduced at their first store in Omaha. That practice became so popular



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