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New eatery takes pizza to the extreme

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Photo by Jeff Fritchen



Extreme pizza owners Trent Warner, Matthew Smith, center, and Anne Smith recently opened a new franchise at the Pike at Rainbow Harbor.

LONG BEACH - Riding Mavericks, scaling Yosemite's Half Dome, snowboarding Alaska's Chugach Mountain Range they're all considered a bit extreme, and they share a common theme with one of the city's newest pizzerias. Extreme Pizza, whose owners raced to open at the Pike at Rainbow Harbor in time for the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach last month, is rolling into the Southland as part of an aggressive expansion plan for the extreme sports-themed pizza parlor chain, which is based in San Francisco. The Pike location, the 16th for the 10-year-old chain, was started by a group of college friends who share a taste for extreme sports. Husband and wife Matthew and Anne Smith, and partner Trent Warner, friends from the University of Colorado Boulder, opened the 1,350-square-foot restaurant here on April 15. The parlor is filled with extreme sports paraphernalia and pictures. Surfboards are mounted to the walls, counters are painted to resemble the classic look of an Arbor Snowboard one counter is an actual snowboard and a patio opens soon, with snowboard benches, as well as tables and umbrellas. Extreme posters fill another wall a skier grabs some air, a climber clings to a sheer rock face, a mountain biker tackles a hairy trail and a pair of televisions continuously play extreme sports tapes. The pizza parlor brings to downtown and the Pike another affordable restaurant in an area rife with upscale dining establishments. The average check at Extreme Pizza comes out to about \$7, according to Anne Smith, a former reporter for Forbes and the now-defunct Red Herring magazine, and an avid skier. "We're in a good price range," Anne said.

A new passion

Anne and Matthew, a snowboarding enthusiast, moved to Los Angeles from San Francisco about eight years ago so Matthew could pursue a career in the film industry. He achieved a modicum of success, working as a production assistant as well as a second assistant director on a variety of films including, "The General's Daughter," starring John Travolta, "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation." But a downturn in the industry convinced him he needed to look for a more stable source of income. The couple was introduced to the Extreme Pizza concept while skiing in Tahoe. They ran into an old friend, Jimmy Ryan, one of founders of Extreme Pizza, who grew up with co-founder Todd Parent in New Jersey. The couple visited several Extreme locations, underwent five weeks of training, secured some financing, signed a franchise agreement and took an apartment at Camden at Harbor View next to the Pike to be close to the business. The parlor carries about 18 different pizzas the pizzeria's motto is "extreme, not mainstream" including: Everest, which comes with a mountain of toppings like Italian sausage, pepperoni, salami, ground beef, mozzarella and tomato sauce; The Boar'der, a pizza loaded with shredded pork marinated in barbecue sauce, red onions and cilantro, cheddar and mozzarella cheese; and for dieters there's White Out, a no-cheese, lower-fat pizza with mushrooms, tomatoes, red onions, broccoli, roasted red peppers, basil. Pizzas are sold whole and by the slice. At the widest point, the slices measure roughly the width of two average-sized palms placed side by side. A cheese slice costs \$2.50, and it goes up to \$3.75 for a Meathead pizza slice, a luxury version of their pizza.

Extreme growth

There are five Extreme Pizza locations in Southern California. The Westwood Village location opened last month, a location in Irvine opened four months ago and two San Diego locations have opened in the past year. Since Extreme Pizza franchisees must agree to open multiple locations, the expansion in the Southland is expected to be ... extreme. The owner of the Westwood Village location has signed to open 11 of the restaurants in and around the Los Angeles and valley areas, the owners of the Long Beach location have agreed to open at least six locations, mostly in Southern California coastal communities, and the Orange County franchisees are expected to open at least three locations. "We're opening about one a month right now," said Todd Parent, owner of the chain. "We're opening 20 plus units in Southern California over the next three to five years." Parent has laid out plans for expansion all over the state, including locations set for Denver, and Austin and Seattle. Parent, an extreme sports enthusiast the 37-year-old has tried his hand at wind surfing, kite surfing, snowboarding and skiing, just a few of his favorite activities plans to continue to rapid expansion in the San Francisco Bay area. Three locations are set to open in both the East and West Bay, and spaces are being sought in the Peninsula south of the Bay.