

Cheese shop ripens

Hutt City
GO AHEAD

By SIMON EDWARDS

Lower Hutt – and Moera shopping centre in particular – will gain from expansion of the Zany Zeus product line and the opening last Saturday of a smart new retail outlet.

When multi-award-winning artisan cheesemaker Michael Matsis started making the salty, minty Greek Cypriot cheese halloumi and other organic ricottas, fetas and yoghurts at a plant in Randwick Rd 12 years ago, he had a small counter out front to sell to the public.

But he enjoyed interacting with customers so much, talking over recipes and the best way to cook his products, that he was distracted from the business of production.

And he soon needed to reclaim the space the shop took up as the business started to take off.

“We ended up using that little space as a packing room,” he said last week.

Michael and his sister Meropi – she masterminds the sales and marketing side, while he is a “hands on” production manager – grew up in Whanganui.



Family operation: Cheesemaker Michael Matsis, with his sister Meropi, the company’s sales and marketing whiz. Their parents are also still regularly involved in the Zany Zeus operation.

Michael would carry home cans of fresh milk from a farm so their mother Lefki could make traditional Cypriot cheeses.

While Zany Zeus products are available from Moore Wilson

and some supermarkets, Michael says he has deliberately concentrated on the hospitality trade.

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Chefs around New Zealand who appreciate quality products made from organic milk, and free of emulsifiers, stabilisers, gelatine and gums, don’t just boast on their menus and to reviewers. They use halloumi and feta, but specifically mention it is Zany Zeus cheese.

So why open a new shop now, and why not at a trendy Wellington spot? Michael says there is good brand recognition, and the time is ripe to showcase Zany Zeus products and introduce an extended range.

For starters there’s new premium icecream made with fresh organic milk and cream, available in 14 flavours, including cookies and cream, pistachio and almond brittle, feijoa, chocolate rough, and sorbet flavours. Soy icecream and snow freezes will suit those who are lactose intolerant.

Cultured products – creme fraiche, mascarpone, cream cheese and sour cream – and all his cheeses that are still made just along the road in the original factory – will be sold in retail-sized packets.

Zany Zeus will be also be launching a new range of smoked cheese, including smoked brinza, ricotta and paneer, as well as a New Zealand first – smoked yoghurt.



Flavour treat: Zany Zeus is now making its own style of organic icecream.

Gourmet yoghurt with fresh fruit toppings and marinated feta in herbs and oils will also be on sale.

Greek sweet treats – “a little bit of our heritage” – such as baklava and katafi, made by close friends of the Matsis family in Australia, will also feature, which can be matched with coffee made with Michael’s Zorganic milk.

The manufacturing operation is well established in Moera, and while the long-term plan is to have an off-site cheese maturation plant, “it’s functional where we are”.

“The next step will be to make something bigger but while there were temptations to move into Wellington it wasn’t really for us,” Michael says.

“Moera is a nice area; we’ve got good through traffic and it’s a busy little spot. Things have evolved and we’ve grown in the area we’ve always been.”

Zany Zeus now has a dozen staff and, like Michael, shop assistants Hannah and Janet, who help make products, will be happy to talk about recipes and cooking methods with customers.

Michael says while he can’t accommodate people’s desire to get up close to the icecream-making operation at the back of the new shop, he’s separated the two with a glass wall so customers can watch what’s going on.

The shop at 149 Randwick Rd will open from 10am till 5pm Wednesdays to Sundays.