

## Ohana Cupcakes at Westfield UTC: No baker left behind

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With decorative hues as vibrantly varied as their flavors of batter, Ohana Cupcakes takes on the feel of an old-fashioned ice cream shop, or perhaps even the candy store on Main Street in Disneyland. While their flagship store is located off Vista Way in Oceanside, the cupcake shop recently expanded to the UTC Westfield Mall in La Jolla and is having their grand opening in July.

“Normally, when you walk into a bakery, it’s pretty small and all you have is the pastry case to pick from,” said Megan Wilson, head chef at Ohana Cupcakes. “But at Ohana, there’s this huge floor with all these bright colors and different decorating stations...it’s honestly like walking into a Willy Wonka store.”

Carts of sweet treats, aprons, oven mitts and leis rest on waves of turquoise, lime green and sunset orange that cascade the floor. There are tubes of candy dispensers that reach the ceiling, a window to view the chefs at work and three cupcake stations for baking and creating. At Ohana, guests can choose to either buy ready-made cupcakes, or create their own.

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“A lot of people founder of Ohana where they voted events for their

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It was actually her own sweet-toothed children (and an Easy-Bake Oven) that inspired McKenna and her husband Mark to open Ohana Cupcakes.

“When the kids were little, we did a lot of Build-A-Bear and Ceramic Café together and I always thought that doing something with food would be great,” said McKenna. “My boys loved baking brownies and cookies, but the only Easy-Bake Ovens we could find were pink. It was gender-oriented and I knew it shouldn’t be.”

It was when McKenna’s daughter made some cupcakes for one of her brothers, and McKenna saw the “connection and love” that went into baking together, that she and Mark decided to start a company where everyone could do the same. The name stemmed not only from their time living in Hawaii, but also from this concept of “togetherness.”

“Ohana’ means family, like from ‘Lilo and Stitch,’ and ‘family’ means never leaving anyone behind,” said McKenna. “It’s inclusive. We really wanted to focus on everyone baking, not just girls.”

Their kids have all grown up now, but so has the dream. Ohana Cupcakes now caters to weddings, birthday parties, baby showers and corporate events. Passion fruit, coconut, pineapple mango and Kona mocha are just a few of the unique Hawaiian flavors in Ohana’s cupcakes. McKenna also hopes their new La Jolla location will be known for their vegan-and gluten-free cupcakes, such as cinnamon sugar, lemon, coconut and cookie dough.

“Healthy eating is in such high-demand out here and we’re seeing a lot of positive responses to the flavors so far,” said McKenna. “That’s a huge credit to our chefs.”

The freedom to create out-of-the-box flavors was one of the reasons Wilson was drawn to Ohana.

“To be able to come to work and run with a new idea I have is amazing,” said Wilson. “Whatever the bakers and I feel like baking that morning, we can bake. It’s a good opportunity for the customers to try new flavors and I feel like the environment has helped grow me as a chef.

“I think everyone being able to express themselves and be creative is one of the biggest differences between Ohana and other shops.”

“It’s really about creating memories, and I love all the connections that get made with the staff and the kids and their parents,” said McKenna. “But my favorite thing is making a difference, one cupcake at a time.”

When: Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Contact: [ohanacupcake.com](http://ohanacupcake.com), or call 760-757-4262



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