

How Finance Fund, others kept Jeni's alive

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While personal notes and social media kept spirits up at embattled [Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams LLC](#) this year, prominent Central Ohioans and organizations buoyed its finances behind the scenes.

The Columbus boutique ice cream maker is wrapping its most tumultuous year, when it suffered through a \$2.5 million product recall after listeria was found in a pint of its ice cream last April. The recall meant a month with no sales and a prolonged production shutdown that led to a change in how it makes its treats.

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Finance Fund Executive Vice President Andrew Swary, left, President Diana Turoff, Jeni... [more](#)

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“We were a company with no income, significant fixed costs and at that time no identifiable path back to health,” CEO [John Lowe](#) said in an interview this week with *Columbus Business First*.

But a group of backers emerged to help the business through its summer of woe, led by the Finance Fund, which provided a \$1.5 million, six-month loan that has been repaid. The loan was delivered alongside investments from manufacturing and building company Crane Group; the Ingram family, owners of White Castle System Inc.; and PNC Financial Services Group Inc.

Lowe said that without that financial support, the company might not have made it.

“This was outside of what we do,” recalled [Diana Turoff](#), president of the Finance Fund, a nonprofit funding resource for public- and private-sector organizations to help Ohio communities. “When we heard about the situation, we wanted to be able to assist them in their time of crisis. We knew there was no way a bank would be able to provide assistance in the time they needed.”

The fund moved quickly. It takes about 45 days to put together a typical business loan, but the Finance Fund turned around the Jeni’s loan in a week.

“The key for us was to help them retain those jobs,” said [Andrew Swary](#), executive vice president. “That’s squarely within our mission.”

Lowe said the effort saved the livelihoods of hundreds of workers at Jeni’s main office in Columbus and 23-store network.

The company lauded the fund and other supporters with its highest honor – the Golden Jeni’s Mug award, which is reserved for employees. Other recipients included Columbus Foundation CEO Doug Kridler and Columbus Partnership CEO Alex Fischer, whom Lowe credited for their advice and support.

Founder Jeni Britton Bauer described business today as “super normal.”

“We’ve been able to reflect and that’s good,” she said. “We’ve been working on some awesome new flavors. We have two new collections that are coming to life.”

The company also has made some hires. It has added its first chief sales officer, hiring Rachelle Lynch, a consultant to the company who helped raise Jeni’s presence in natural and specialty grocery stores. Her previous experience included nine years at Durham, North Carolina-based personal care business Burt’s Bees Inc.

“We have been recruiting her for years and we are so happy to have finally talked her into joining the team full-time,” Lowe said.

The company also hired Danielle Keska as its creative director. She joins Jeni's from Moxie, a marketing agency, where she was senior art director.

Jeni's promoted Ryan Morgan from digital director to experience leader, which is part of the business' leadership team.

Dan Eaton covers retailing and restaurants for Columbus Business First.