

Freezies that kick

Keep an eye on the kids, frozen vodkasicles are coming this summer

BY DAFNA IZENBERG • Forget about a fly in your Chardonnay. This summer, you could have a Black Fly freezie. London, Ont.-based micro-distillery Black Fly Beverage Company, which last spring launched a “less sweet” cooler across the province, will soon be introducing Spiked Ice, a vodka-infused frozen treat for grown-ups. The company is owned and operated by husband-wife team Rob Kelly, 41, and Cathy Siskind-Kelly, 38, who originally planned to open a craft-brewery. When the couple discovered the faster-growing market was spirit-coolers, they set to work concocting a recipe that called for all-Canadian ingredients (Ontario vodka, Quebec cranberry juice, and wild blueberry juice from the Maritimes), “softer bubbles,” and less than half the sugar of most coolers. They also spent 18 months in discussions with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario before applying for a manufacturing licence, the first ever approved by the AGCO for a micro-distillery. “That was a very uncertain period for us,” reflects Siskind-Kelly.

They got the green light in December 2004, began production, and persuaded the LCBO, the world’s largest single purchaser of beverage alcohol, to give the Black Fly cooler a test flight in six London-area stores. “We were able to miraculously hit the shelves for the May long weekend,” Siskind-Kelly says. Today, the LCBO distributes the cooler to 380 of its 600 stores. “We were pleasantly surprised,” says spokesman Chris Layton of Black Fly’s success, crediting among other things the company’s all-Canadian production and competitive pricing.

Spiked Ice is set to debut in 170 LCBO stores within weeks, and the Kellys are looking at markets in Alberta, Quebec and the East Coast. They also think consumers in the United States may be interested in Black Fly; as Kelly points out, black flies are indigenous to all of North America. “The name resounds on a regional level,” says Kelly, “but it is universal.” **M**

