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VENERABLE CREAMERY HITS BIG TIME

BRIAN DONNELL/MCTIMP

ICE CREAM DESSERTS await patrons at Fentons Creamery on Saturday. The ice cream parlor, which has been in Oakland for 115 years, is featured in Disney/Pixar's latest film, "UP."

WALT DISNEY PICTURES/PIXAR

FENTONS CREAMERY is the most recent in a long line of local connections integrated into Emeryville-based Pixar and other films. The movie's director, Pete Docter, lives nearby and is a longtime Fentons customer.

Film makes Fentons famous

■ Historic Oakland restaurant goes to the big screen in Pixar's animated hit 'Up'

By Tony Hicks
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — At first glance, Dug stands as the only visible indicator of Fentons newfound stardom.

The cerebrally challenged talking pooch from "Up" obediently stays atop a case in a corner of the landmark Piedmont Avenue ice-cream parlor. Of course, he's stuffed, which makes it easier to take photos.

But his presence hasn't been missed by fans of Pixar's animated summer hit. Business has been up — so to speak — at Oakland's 115-year-old ice-cream parlor and restaurant since late May when "Up" audiences noticed Fentons, which plays a small, but key, role in the film.

The line was once again out the door Saturday, as it has been since late May, with plenty of former Fentons lovers coming back to join the regulars that often spill onto the patio.

When they take their kids to "Up," old-timers remember the taste of cold vanilla mixing with hot fudge, while sitting on iron-backed chairs at marble tables. They remember seeing the man in the white hat near the back, pouring gum balls into a humming machine to make bubble gum ice cream.

And as they dig into their Black & Tan, they're talking about "Up" in which a chubby, overeager 8-year-old Boy Scout named Russell

See FENTONS, Page 8

Fentons

FROM PAGE 1

muses about sitting on the curb outside Fentons, counting red and blue cars with his estranged father. Later, he recreates the moment with grandfatherly Carl Fredricksen (voiced by Ed Asner) and his loyal dog, Dug. As the camera pans up, Fentons' famous facade fills the screen.

It caught at least one longtime Fentons fan by surprise.

"I had no idea it was in the movie until we spotted it there," says Dave Anderson, who brought wife Cathy and his three grandkids from Clovis to Fentons after seeing the film. "It's a tradition. I'm 65, and I've been coming here since I was 10."

Owner Scott Whidden doesn't think the store has become a tourist attraction yet. But the past few weeks have brought a lot of faces from years past.

"I don't know if out-of-towners connect with it, but for people who know Fentons, they see the name and there's something magical about the connection," says Whidden, whose family has owned Fentons for decades. He says the store is expanding across the street this year, with a soda fountain where kids can get involved in making their own treats.

The ice-cream parlor is the most recent in a long line of local connections integrated into Emeryville-based Pixar and other films. "The Incredibles" featured a police chase down San Pablo Avenue, which runs from Oakland to West Contra Costa. Much of Paramount/DreamWorks' "Monsters vs Aliens" took place from San Francisco to Modesto. Even the flying house from "Up" is based on a Victorian in West Berkeley.

The film's director, Pete Docter, lives nearby and is a longtime Fentons customer. Groups of Pixar employees regularly frequent Fentons for lunch and special events. So it was only natural for Fentons to be cast when the script called for an ice-cream parlor.

"I've seen a lot of people sitting on the curb, eating their ice cream," says manager Jeffrey Unversaith. "Kids come in and want to see Dug the dog and want to know how many red and blue cars have come by today."

The store is being careful not to exploit its newfound fame; there's little inside indicating the movie tie-in. Other than Dug, which was a gift from Pixar, the only other memento is a framed picture of Fentons' appearance in the film, hanging in the manager's office.

Fentons does, however, offer a free ice-cream scoop to ticket stub-wielding customers, many of whom take pictures in front of the building.

"It was fun," says Joel Gonzales, who sat in a booth with his 3-year-old son, Diego. "We were talking to Diego about coming to Fentons. Then we saw it in the movie and I said 'Hey, that's where we're going.'"

Grant and Garner Hendrick saw the movie and brought their 11-year-old, banana-split-devouring son, Graham, from San Carlos for a taste of the real thing. "It was a while since I'd been to Fentons, but I remembered it," Garner said. "That was really cool to see. That's why we came here."

Unversaith says the movie shows how the community feels about Fentons. "Some of our employees said when they saw the movie and Fentons came on, the whole movie theater started applauding. This is a global movie, so for people who don't know what Fentons is, it has that connection."

Fentons Creamery
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