



DESO CHOCOLATE

DELIVERS DESSERT WITH AN INTERNATIONAL FLAIR

BY AUDREY HANES
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

Ibrahim Al Elamat loves his newfound hometown of Jonesboro, and he loves bringing international flavors to the community.

Al Elamat's first restaurant venture in Jonesboro was the opening of Pella, a Greek and Mediterranean Café. Last year, he embarked on a new venture with the opening of DESO Chocolate, a dessert shop featuring Belgium chocolate with a traditional Turkish flair.

DESO Chocolate, named after the four "happy hormones" – Dopamine, Endorphins, Serotonin and Oxytocin – opened its doors in Jonesboro's Greensborough Village last November and has been encouraging its patrons to "Indulge in Happiness" ever since.

Al Elamat opened his first restaurant in 2013 in Jordan while he was attending a university to earn his degree in journalism. After moving to the United States and working in the restaurant industry in Indianapolis, he moved to Jonesboro in 2019 to attend Arkansas State University and finish his master's degree in communications. He opened Pella Café in December 2020, followed by DESO Chocolate in 2023, along with other local business ventures.

"I like to travel; I take big trips three or four times a year," he said. "I have notes with me all the time on my phone – ideas, business, photos, etc. – and when I see a new idea for a business that doesn't exist in Jonesboro, I take pics and notes and try to understand the idea behind this business. Two years ago, I had the concept, menu and everything but the name for a place like DESO. Last year I got serious about it, and then I found this location in such a great new area."

The idea of a café-style eatery that featured Belgium chocolate and Turkish coffee and tea came from Jordan, and it was a concept Al Elamat was sure would soon catch on in Jonesboro.

"Places like this started growing in the cities in Jordan; people need coffee and tea, and at the same time need something to eat," said Al Elamat. "There is a tradition of sweet places in Jordan. There they have kunafa (Arabic dessert) and things like that, but the concept of crepes and waffles is something our generation really likes, so we wanted to have them here. At the same time, I don't need to be out of my cultural traditions, so we still have the coffee and tea and the design. I brought those ideas all together here at DESO. ...

"If I put something in my mind in business, I do it. For those two years, I wasn't just thinking about it, I was looking for the machines, looking how to import them from Turkey and Jordan. ... I went to Jordan and Turkey three or four times, visited the factories that make those chocolate machines and trained myself with one of my friends back in Jordan who has a store with the same concept."

DESO Chocolate's menu begins with several different types of crepes. The Tropical Bliss Crepe is a folded crepe with banana, pineapple and strawberries, topped with three different kinds of Belgian chocolate – milk, dark and white, and the Fettuccine Crepe is a crepe cut fettuccini-style with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and white, milk and dark chocolate. Other crepe offerings include the Trio-Chocolate Crepe, Lotus Crepe, Oreo Crepe, Brownies Crepe, DESO Roll, Banana Cinnamon Crepe Pouch and the DESO Mystery Pouch.

Next up is the selection of waffles, which are available with toppings such as fruit, brownies, Lotus biscuit crumbs, Oreos and, of course, four different kinds of chocolate. The dessert sushi is also popular; made with crepes and filled with fruits and other sweets before being drizzled with Belgian chocolate, the sushi is meant to be easy to eat and fun to share. Other offerings include a French



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croissant, a waffle stick, mini pancakes and an éclair pyramid. Many of the menu items are available in larger sharing options and combinations, as well.

“The most popular item on the menu is the DESO roll,” said Al Elamat of the crepe roll that is generously filled with DESO special cream, strawberries, brownies and eclairs, topped with three different kinds of Belgian chocolate. “The Turkish Tea and the Arabic Coffee are also what I would recommend.”

Customers often cite the Karak Tea as a favorite; the drink is a blend of robust black tea infused with aromatic spices and enriched with evaporated milk. Also offered are Arabic Coffee, brewed from the finest ground Arabic coffee beans with cardamom, ginger and saffron, the Turkish Coffee, made from fine ground coffee beans with cardamom, and several other teas, coffees and a hot chocolate. DESO Chocolate also sells fresh Baklava, a layered Turkish dessert made of filo pastry sheets that are filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with syrup or honey.

In the future, Al Elamat says he hopes to add a fully-equipped kitchen and introduce a breakfast menu, depending on how his customers receive traditional Turkish breakfast foods, such as olives. He also plans to franchise the chocolate shop; although Jonesboro will be the base for DESO Chocolate, Little Rock and Memphis locations are coming soon, with more plans to expand across the state of Arkansas.

“We have a really amazing manager, Caitlyn, who has been with us since we opened; she does a really great job,” he said. “So do all of our employees. I know the idea came from me and my partners, it was a lot of travel and hard work, but without our great employees and the people of Jonesboro, DESO wouldn’t be here today. We have already started doing large catering orders and have had people order special occasion cakes from us. ...

“Our commitment to community engagement sets us apart, particularly in the vibrant area of Northeast Arkansas, where we are deeply rooted. Our love for Jonesboro and Arkansas fuels our dedication to starting and expanding projects within the state, supported by its people and friends.”

Al Elamat says he has had a family travel all the way from Fort Smith just to eat at DESO Chocolate. The dessert café has also had diners from Mississippi and Kentucky.

“People are always looking to do something fun, and as one of those people, I love to go out with my family and eat with them,” said Al Elamat. “Before I started with Pella, and now I’m here at DESO, and people here are amazing and so nice. Everyone from the City of Jonesboro to the fire and police departments support us. If you want to open a business here, you will see all that support. If you do, you won’t be disappointed.”

As summer approaches, Al Elamat says DESO plans to soon offer cold drinks such as a non-alcoholic mojito and a milkshake.

“I see the smiles when people walk in; our customers love it,” said Al Elamat. “It smells so amazing’ – that’s the first thing I hear when people walk in. I love the smiles on kids’ faces when they walk in and see the chocolate. I have people that come just about every day to eat our chocolate.

“When you have an idea and you work on it, it’s like a baby and you raise it and take care of it, and it grows and grows; that’s what I’m doing now. I’m enjoying opening a new business idea. I enjoy doing something different and new. I’m not going to stop bringing new ideas to Jonesboro.”

DESO Chocolate, located at 1009 Canera Drive, Suite 105A, is open Sunday through Thursday from noon to 8 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from noon to 10 p.m. For more information, call (870) 790-3040 or find DESO Chocolate on social media.

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