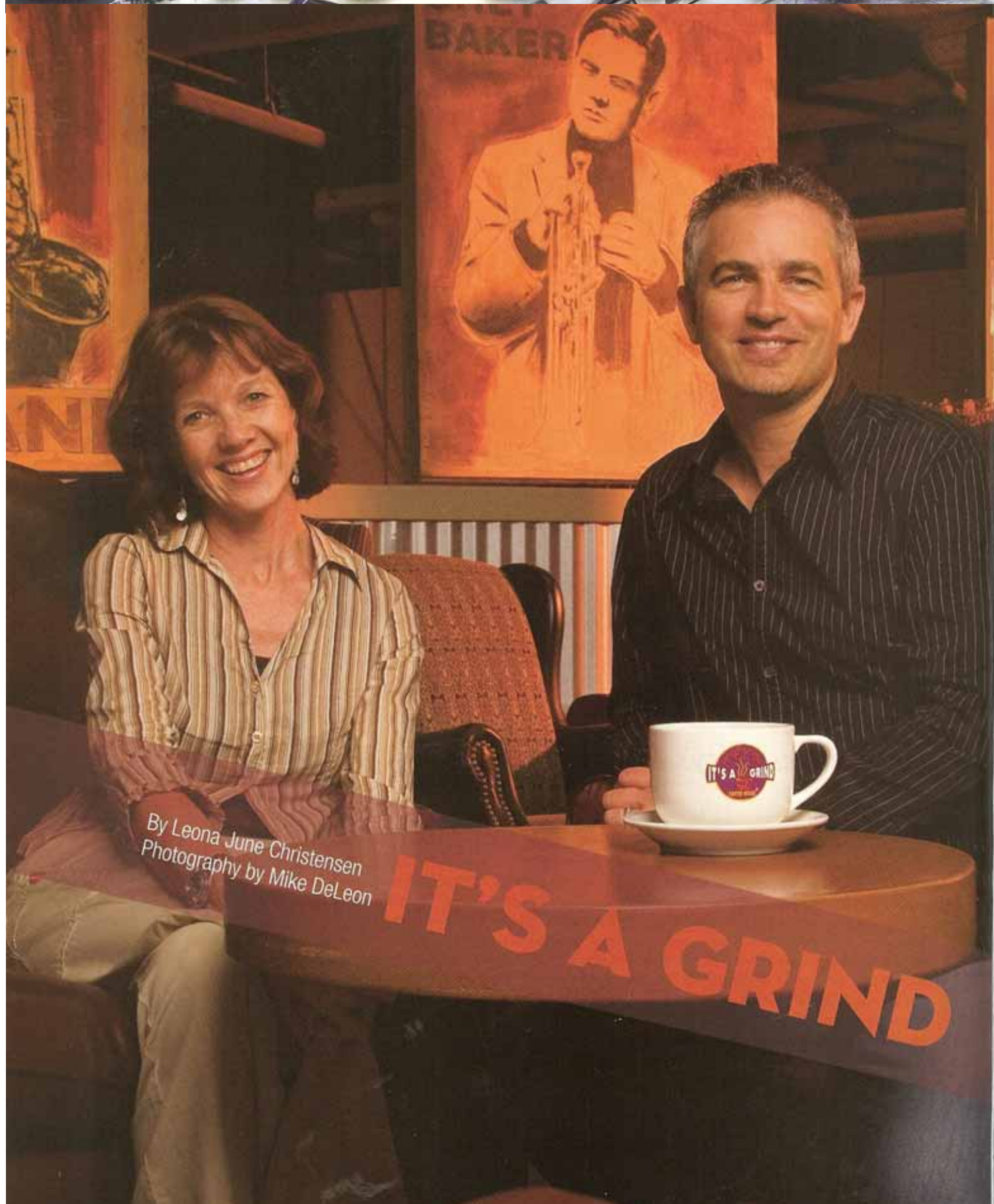


LONG BEACH



By Leona June Christensen
Photography by Mike DeLeon

IT'S A GRIND

Sipping a beverage at one of the It's A Grind coffeehouses feels like enjoying a cup of java in your best friend's living room.

For more than thirteen years, Long Beach husband-and-wife team Marty Cox and Louise Montgomery have shared their passion for coffee and animals with the community. The company is as well known for their specialty espresso drinks as for offering complimentary water and treats for pets. The health department does not allow animals inside establishments where food is prepared, but pets are welcome outside in the patio seating. When employees see customers coming to an It's A Grind with dogs in tow, they bring out biscuits and a bowl of water.

"We have one dog at our first location who has had an ice-blended mocha every day for twelve years," Montgomery said.

"The guy buys one for himself and one for his dog," Cox added.

It's A Grind debuted in 1994 on Spring Street and Los Coyotes Diagonal in Long Beach. Now the company is the fastest-growing coffeehouse franchise in America, with locations in sixteen states. More than half

of them are in California, with the hundredth location about to open on Second Street in Belmont Shore. A new store is opened every five days.

Montgomery is locally known as one of the most committed animal advocates, and is a key supporter for Friends of Long Beach Animals, a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the welfare of animals and a strong advocate of spaying and neutering pets. Montgomery spoke of the necessity of spaying and neutering animals, as local shelters are filled with mutt and purebred dogs and cats. One unaltered cat can be responsible for 95 kittens in one year, she said.


"It's more than just a passion for Louise," said Cox. "It's everything for her. She donates thirty to forty hours a week to animal causes. She has an amazing knack for finding the perfect owner for the perfect pet. She is personally responsible for hundreds of matches of dogs and owners each year."

Before opening It's A Grind, Cox was a daily customer at a now-defunct coffeehouse. One day, he forgot to bring his wallet. He was given his usual coffee drink and told just to pay tomorrow. The next day, even before Cox approached the cash register, the owner called out, "Hey Marty, did you ever pay for that drink we had to give you the other day?" From that day on, Cox vowed that his coffeehouses would always treat customers with dignity and respect.

It's the baristas who make It's A Grind stand out from other coffeehouses. Cox and Montgomery devised a detailed process that utilizes a personality test

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and personal interviews to ensure that each person hired will treat each of their customers as a friend.

"We go to great lengths to hire the right people," said Cox. "All of our employees go through a psychological survey. We are looking for people who genuinely want to help others. Not because they are supposed to, but because it gets them going. You can't cheat at the survey. It's a personality test, and one more tool that helps us identify the right person. We want to make sure each customer is treated like they were a guest in our home." 

WAGS A HAPPY TAIL