



Alaska Star
July 31, 2003

Make-A-Wish kid helps cause

By **DAVID MORSE**

Nine-year-old James France has cystic fibrosis.

You wouldn't know it -- not by the smile on his face, nor the gleam in his green eyes.

Nor from the pleasant disposition and the servant-like attitude he displayed during a Make-A-Wish Foundation fundraiser, hosted by Cold Stone Creamery in Eagle River July 24.

A Palmer resident and sports enthusiast, France had the opportunity to serve up the ice cream with professional hockey player Brian Swanson of the Edmonton Oilers during a free ice cream feed at Cold Stone in the Pippel Center.

Although the foundation special, consisting of cookie batter ice cream with toppings of Oreo, fudge and M&Ms, was free, donations were accepted, said Cold Stone owner, Linda Vrem.

Vrem said she was impressed with France's willingness to jump right in and work elbow-to-elbow on the front line, serving the masses.

The 4-foot, 51-pound France worked the assembly counter, mixing the concoction on the stone and serving hundreds of regular patrons and those wooed by members of the Chugiak High cheerleading squad at the corner of Business Boulevard and the Old Glenn Highway.

Outside the store, face-painting and faddish hair-spray treatments awaited those who contributed to the fund.

France's mother, Amanda Ward, said he loves school and sports, although his participation in both are adversely affected by his sickness.

Ward works in the progressive care unit at Providence Hospital.

France will be entering fourth grade at Palmer's Sherrod Elementary next month.



STAR PHOTO BY DAN SHEPARD

James France, 9, and professional hockey player Brian Swanson pose while working the counter at Cold Stone Creamery July 24. Swanson and his wife, Lynn, helped with the Make-A-Wish Foundation fundraiser. France, of Palmer, is a recipient.

"He likes to stay active in school," she said, but added that there are often days when she keeps her son home from school to rest up.

"He gets worn out," Ward added.

As part of the Make a Wish Foundation program, France, his mother, 4-year-old brother Christian, and maternal grandparents, all of Palmer, were flown to Florida in mid-March for a vacation that included admission to all the parks in Disney World, along with the Kennedy Space Center and MGM Studios.

The trip was wonderful, said Ward.

"His response to me was that he felt like he was famous," she said.

Ward said she and James first became aware of the Make-A-Wish Foundation three years ago. The wishes come true in part via fundraisers such as the one at Cold Stone.

Vrem said this year's response had more than doubled the inaugural fundraising, with nearly \$1,000 being raised during the 5-8 p.m. serving session of more than 220 people specifically there to support Make-A-Wish and see France and Brian Swanson.

Ward said that the Make-A-Wish experience has been transforming in the life of her son.

"It's really important to these kids. We don't know how long James will live - he could live until he's 30, but to see their (those children in the program) dreams being brought to life is just awesome."

Contributions to the Make-A-Wish Foundation will be received through the end of the month, said Vrem.