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Ice cream idol

By JOHANNA CROSBY

Kyle Kenyon waved his arms rhythmically like oars as he did a funky dance he dubbed "The Canoe."

"You probably haven't seen this in clubs yet," cracked the 19-year-old from West Dennis.

An uninhibited Amanda Diehl, 16, of Hyannis, who had tried out for the TV singing competition "American Idol," writhed like a worm on the carpeted floor.

The teens weren't competing in an amateur talent show. They were trying out for a job as a crew member with Cold Stone Creamery.

The Arizona-based ice cream chain uses an innovative approach in hiring - an audition-style interview that's a cross between "American Idol" and "The Apprentice" - to find employees with the right personality, who can serve up what the company calls the "ultimate ice cream experience."

"If the crew members are having fun, they keep the customers happy," said Ken Kirwin who is opening the chain's first Cape store next month at Festival of Hyannis shopping plaza off Route 132.

The creamery is known as much for its entertainment value as for its customized 34 ice cream creations, including Oreo Overload, Strawberry Shortcake Serenade, and Cheesecake Fantasy. Besides serving up the super-premium ice cream, crew members are expected to greet and interact with customers and sing and dance for tips to boost their \$6.75 hourly wage.

"It's about presentation as much as the product, and creating a show that's fun to watch," said Jordan Levine, the company's area developer for Massachusetts.

But working at Cold Stone Creamery isn't all fun and games. New hires undergo four to 10 days of training to nail down the basic skills of making ice cream fresh daily at the store. The ice cream has a smooth, creamy texture, somewhere between hard-packed and soft-serve., Servers don't scoop the ice cream, but pull it with two spades because the method is more aesthetically appealing, said store manager Christine Stevens. They have five seconds to mix the ice cream on a granite stone (set at a chilling 16 degrees so it won't melt) and blend in a variety of mix-ins including nuts, fruits, candy and other toppings.

Besides making ice cream each day, they also whip up brownies, waffle cones, smoothies, shakes and ice cream cakes.

Cold Stone typically hires high school and college students.

"Personality is key," Levine said. "We can teach them the skills."

Cold Stone looks for job applicants who have a passion for ice cream and are outgoing, energetic and entertaining. And that's where the audition comes in.

As part of that talent search, Kirwin held five auditions that drew 60 applicants. He plans to hire 30 to 35 people to cover all shifts..

Fifteen people, primarily women, showed up for two auditions in recent weeks at the Ramada Inn in Hyannis. The 60-minute auditions were more like a competition than a traditional job interview. The hopefuls wore nametags and sat directly across from the judges including Kirwin and Stevens. They got a taste of what the job is like by watching a film featuring ever-smiling Cold Stone crew cutting up by flipping ice cream spades, tossing waffle cones, and breaking into song and dance routines.

The Cold Stone wannabees had to sing jingles such as "A Scoopin' We Will Do" set to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell" and "Sprinkle, Sprinkle Candy Bar" ("Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"). During a Q&A, the job applicants were tested to find out how quickly they could think on their feet. Stevens asked each of them a question including: "How would your best friend describe you?" and "If you won \$1 million, what would you do?"

Asked "What is the one thing you want to do before you die?", Lauren Boudreau, 48, of Marstons Mills said she wanted to walk on a glacier. Michelle Horen, 18, of Dennis said she wanted to go to Paris.

When the applicants were asked to demonstrate their best move, one young woman rolled her tongue as if it were a wet noodle. A long-haired guy performed the hula.

Jessica Paulin, 19, of Hyannis, did a freestyle dance.

"I put my heart and soul into it and gave it my all," she said afterwards. "You have to make a goof of yourself."

Horen was nervous about trying to impress the judges.

"What if they don't like me?" she fretted.

But she managed to hide her jitters behind a wide grin.

Boudreau, who executed a robotic Batman dance, thought the audition was a "hoot." She wasn't intimidated about competing with teenagers for the job.

"You have to make a fool of yourself," she said. "If you can't do it, it's not the job for you."

Boudreau hoped to get hired because "I want to work somewhere that will be fun. I'm tired of grumpy people."