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Shop aims to make a better ice cream

BY: Anna Marie Kukec
Daily Herald Staff Writer

How about a scoop of Chicagodough with French vanilla ice cream hand-blended with cookie dough, chocolate chips and fudge and caramel.

Or The Cake Hours with cake batter ice cream mixed with brownies, fudge and rainbow sprinkles.

Then there's Lord of the Oreos with Double Oreos, chocolate chips and fudge expertly folded into sweet cream ice cream.

Mmmm, rich ice cream creations made with ... a stone.

A frozen stone.

In fact, an 85-pound Italian black granite slab, about 18 inches by 65 inches, frozen to 16 degrees.

The frosty slab isn't likely your first thought when entering an ice cream parlor. But it's key to mixing homemade ice cream, sorbets and yogurts at the Cold Stone Creamery, which had its grand opening Wednesday at 23 W. Jefferson Ave. in downtown Naperville. A soft opening last Friday drew lines out the door.

"That stone is what creates the special consistency for the creations," said owner Linda Querrey, 35, of Bolingbrook.

Thorndale Construction Services Inc. of Oakbrook Terrace installed two 85-pound granite stones above the stainless steel counters.

"They're not attached to the counter," said Thorndale President Alan W. Horsman. "They're actually placed above a layer of water, which freezes and keeps the stone in place."

The unique construction adds to the 1,500-square-foot creamery, which offers more than a dozen basic flavors made fresh daily as well as countless combinations.

You also have a choice of regular, low fat and no fat varieties, including some sugar free.

"It's not hard packed, not soft serve. It's a new category of ice cream," said Jami Thompson, a spokeswoman for Cold Stone Creamery, headquartered in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The Naperville store seats about 30 and features a singing crew. Slip a tip into a nearby jar and any one of the 25 crew members will break into a song of appreciation.

"We don't care if they can sing," General Manager Nancy Capezio said. "We want them for their personalities and their customer service. Most of all, we want them to have fun. It's their five minutes of fame."

The creamery is run by Capezio and Querrey, who are sisters. Capezio, 42, of Warrenville, is a former manager at Starbucks in Glen Ellyn.

Querrey, a marketing executive, bought into the franchise after hearing about it from colleagues on the East and West coasts. She learned the franchise was started in 1988 by Donald and Susan Sutherland in Tempe, Ariz. Today, the privately held company has 343 franchise stores in 42 states and the Caribbean.

Querrey plans to open another Cold Stone Creamery near I-55 and Weber Road in Bolingbrook in 2004. She's also eyeing other properties in the Western suburbs.

Thorndale is already working on others planned for South Elgin, Northbrook and Chicago.

Besides Naperville, Cold Stone Creamery stores are in Geneva, Lake in the Hills, Buffalo Grove, Arlington Heights and Schaumburg.

"I've never been in business before, but I couldn't pass this up," Querrey said.

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