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Sweet deal for Dover charity: Ice cream store profits go to at-risk youth

By **Bill Potter, Delaware State News**

DOVER - John V. Link Jr. poured the white-beige secret ingredient into the batter to make one of Cold Stone Creamery's special flavors.

As he did, several girls in the front of the store broke out in song after one of many customers left a tip.

"We'll be a dip and mixing for a tip," they sung to the tune of "She'll be Coming Around the Mountain."

"We'll dipping and a mixing, we'll be dipping and a mixing, we'll be dipping and a mixing - for a tip."

While the new store, next to Fashion Bug in the North Dover Shopping Center on U.S. 13, may seem a cheery place to find a cherry cone, the reason it is there is anything but.

All profits from the ice cream shop go directly to Aid in Dover Inc., a local nonprofit organization that provides help for youth between the ages of 12-17 who are dependent, neglected, abused, runaway or homeless.

Aid in Dover bought the popular franchise to fund its programs to give at-risk youth a chance.

"By the time we get these children, their hearts are hardened," said Beverly C. Williams, executive director of the Dover organization. "This might be their last shot."

Mrs. Williams, who is also the president of Dover's city council, said the idea of opening a private business to support a nonprofit isn't new to her.

She started Delaware Designs, a graphic design firm, in 1998, and while the company did well, it didn't produce the kind of money needed to run Aid in Dover, especially as government contributions ebbed and commitments grew, Mrs. Williams said.

"As money got tighter, we got bled," she said. "It's hard for small nonprofits to do fund-raising."

Soon, Mrs. Williams began looking for franchise opportunities to earn more money for her organization.

The answer was right in her backyard.

Mr. Link was working as the controller for the nonprofit and knew of Cold Stone Creamery because he and his wife had once thought about opening their own franchise.

When Mrs. Williams mentioned the problem, he told her about the ice cream shop and soon they were in negotiations.

"The biggest problem we had was convincing the company we had the corporate enthusiasm to dedicate to the creamery," Mrs. Williams said. "They came to interview us and they were impressed with how John and I worked together."

"We're definitely passionate about this," said Mr. Link, manager and CEO of the Dover Cold Stone Creamery.



Katie Burke, 9, of Middletown, gives the thumbs-up after tasting a treat from Cold Stone Creamery in Dover Thursday. Delaware State News/Bill Potter

"And I am passionate about the ice cream."

Dipping and mixing

Although the creamery is a means to an end, it is a frosty, silky, sweet, hand-kneaded means.

While the grand opening of the parlor is set for late this afternoon, there was a steady stream of customers Thursday.

Kathryn Burke and her children, Katie, 9 and Jonathan, 11, stopped in for their first Cold Stone experience.

"It's a great day for ice cream," shouted Erika Zeiters, one of the workers.

The Burkes, who drove from Middletown for their ice cream, were awash in choices.

Common flavors such as chocolate and strawberry were readily available, as were the more exotic flavors of sinless sweet cream and white chocolate.

"All the ice cream is made fresh here," Mr. Link said.

As the Burkes decided, Ms. Zeiter scraped a thick layer of frost off a granite slab just behind the ice cream case.

Called a stone, and the namesake for the company, the slab is kept at 16 degrees.

Katie Burke ordered an ice cream treat called a birthday cake remix, made of cake batter ice cream, rainbow sprinkles, brownies and fudge.

Ms. Zeiter took a heaping scoop of ice cream out of the case and spread it on the stone in front of her.

As the Burkes watched, she added the freshly baked gooey brownies and other ingredients and smooshed them into a decorative ball covered in fudge.

"If you don't like it, I'll make you another," Ms. Zeiter said.

Katie, seemingly skeptical, took a tentative bite.

Almost immediately, she smiled so wide the ice cream almost fell out of her mouth and gave everyone in the creamery a thumbs-up sign.

The store is open Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Prices for ice cream generally run from \$2.99 to \$3.59.

The first scoop

The opening of Cold Stone Creamery is the first step of a larger plan for Aid in Dover's nonprofit fundraising, Mrs. Williams said.

"This is the first of four to six franchises," she said.

Ms. Williams said her organization would be seeking other franchising opportunities in other industries.

When the four to six franchises are up and running, she plans to integrate clients from the Aid in Dover agencies as part of the work force.

"This is the most important part," she said. "We will be providing protected employment sites. These children behave to survive in not necessarily socially appropriate ways."

She said the franchises she envisions would prepare the at-risk youth for gainful employment by teaching work skills and a real environment.

When all franchises are up and running, Mrs. Williams envisions funding for her organization to be ongoing.

"In perpetuity," she said. "I love that phrase."