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## **Singing, dancing are just part of the fun at Albany's newest ice cream shop, Cold Stone Creamery**

**By Jennifer Moody**

At Cold Stone Creamery, it's best to check your inhibitions at the door.

It makes it easier to enjoy your 14-ounce, "Gotta-Have-It"-sized super-premium ice cream, especially if you choose the chocolate-dipped waffle cone.

And it just might loosen up your wallet for a dollar tip, which will prompt your servers to burst into song. Really. Sometimes they'll dance, too.

It's all part of the Cold Stone experience, which Albany ice-cream lovers can share starting Saturday at the new Cold Stone Creamery in the parking lot of Heritage Mall.

Store hours will be 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Cold Stone occupies 1,400 square feet of the 3,500-square-foot building. The other tenants are a Great Clips hair salon, which opened last week, and an In & Out Teriyaki, which is to open Tuesday.

All three businesses are considered part of Heritage Mall, though they will have their own hours, said Donna Green, the mall's general manager.

Ice cream is interactive at Cold Stone, starting with the menu.

Pick one of a dozen or so ice cream flavors, or try frozen yogurt or sorbet if those inhibitions insist. Then add any of the 40-some different cookies, candies, syrups and fruits offered for your selection.

Once you've decided, your personal ice-cream chef wields metal ice-cream "spades" to chop and fold the choices together on a frozen granite stone.

Overwhelmed by the possibilities? Cold Stone has 32 "originals" on the menu. There's Coffee Lover's, with coffee ice cream, crushed Heath bars, roasted almonds and a swirl of caramel. Or Paradise Found, with white chocolate ice cream, macadamia nuts, coconut, pineapple and banana. Or go for Apple Pie a la Cold Stone, with sweet cream ice cream, cinnamon, apple pie filling, caramel and graham cracker pie crust.

"I like green," proclaimed 5-year-old Zak Rivera of Albany, spooning up plain mint ice cream during Wednesday's "Family and Friends" night.

Zak was sharing a table with Cheryl Train-Morris of Albany. Her daughter, Aleita Train, was one of the 22 part-time employees marking their first official day of work behind the Albany Cold Stone counter.

Aleita, 17, applied online, then made up her own Cold Stone cheer for her audition. (Yes, employees audition, so it helps if they check their inhibitions, too. Albany franchise owner Jenna Dieker has seen bellydances, handsprings and at least one American Idol candidate while interviewing for the three Cold Stone stores she runs.)

Entertainment is part of the attraction, Aleita said. "It's super-fun. You get to play with ice cream all day!"

Tori Kramer, 17, sang "I'm a Little Teapot" for her audition, and accidentally got the hand motions backward. Cheerleading experience helped her keep it together, she said, and she knew she wanted to be part of the team. "I'm kind of out there like that," she said.

Daniel Lister, 17, doesn't have any cheerleading in his background. But he does have corny jokes, and those plus a few hand props won him a Cold Stone employee apron and visor.

Born in 1988 in Tempe, Ariz., Cold Stone is the creamy creation of two ice-cream lovers, Donald and Susan Sutherland.

As of 2003, the company Web site reported more than 500 stores operating in 41 states and the Caribbean, including 12 others in Oregon. The franchise plans to hit the 1,000-store mark by the end of this year.

Until this week, Cold Stone fans looking to chill out have had to drive to Salem, Eugene or, most recently, Corvallis.

But Dieker, who owns two Cold Stones in Salem, said she heard many customers tell her they'd like a franchise in Albany. When she learned of a vacancy in a development outside the mall, she jumped.

"I thought that would be a great spot," she said.