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NEW BUSINESS | COLD STONE CREAMERY

Tasty frozen assets

**A former wunderkind of Chicago's 'Merc' trades in trading for premium ice cream.
BY MARCIA FREIDENREICH**

Talk about a career change: Michael Schatz left the high-pressure world of trading futures and commodities on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange in the frigid Windy City for selling something sweet and creamy in warm and breezy South Florida.

Ice-cream lovers will delight in the three new locations of Cold Stone Creamery that recently opened in Hallandale Beach, Hollywood and Aventura under Schatz's ownership.

"I spent 17 years on the exchange and got burnt out on trading," said Schatz, of Boca Raton. "In my past life, I wasn't really passionate about what I was doing, it was only financial gratification. Now I experience a lot of personal gratification, and it feels good."

Customers can pick any of 40 mix-ins -- everything from candy to fruit and nuts -- to add to their favorite flavor.

Everything is mixed on a frozen granite stone, and the consistency of the ice cream is smooth, somewhere in between hard-packed and soft-serve varieties.

Ice cream flavors include chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, cake batter, coffee, banana, mint and cheesecake.

Choices of "mix-ins" include Snickers, Reese's Cups, cookie dough, Oreo cookies, chocolate chips, Heath Bars, fruits such as banana, strawberry, pineapple, raspberry, cherry, apple filling and cherry filling. Such nuts as almonds, pecans, walnuts and peanuts can be added as well.

Waffle irons crank out freshly made waffle cones throughout the day. Ice cream, which is also made fresh daily in each store, is served in plain, chocolate-dipped and chocolate-dipped with rainbow sprinkles cones.

For those watching their weight, there is Sinless Sweet Cream, a vanilla frozen treat with no sugar added.

Though Schatz has left trading, his business instincts are still sharp. He said he already serves more than 15,000 people per store, per month, and he hopes to lure in more cake customers too.

"Our hottest topic recently is the ice cream cake. We're taking on the birthday cake market," said Schatz. ``We stock cake displays and do custom cakes for any occasion. We have seasonal treats like Pumpkin Ice Cream, Pumpkin Pie for Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas candy cane and Santa cakes."

Schatz plans to open at least eight more Cold Stone locations from Fort Lauderdale to downtown Miami in the near future.

The nationwide Cold Stone Creamery chain has close to 1,000 stores.

The first was opened in Tempe, Ariz., in 1988.

"All of my stores are certified kosher, the religious customers seem really appreciative of that. We have wireless Internet at our locations so it can become a hangout, not just an ice cream parlor," said Schatz.

"The thing that surprised me is that sometimes, if we're not open yet, people will bang on the doors and say, `We must have Cold Stone!'"

Schatz's wife Kim, daughter Avery, 6, and twin sons Aaron and Alden, 3, love Cold Stone's ice cream as well.

"If I come home without a bucket and the freezer is empty, no one talks to me," Schatz said.