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Cold Stone: great ice cream in very friendly atmosphere; A global ice cream connoisseur's journey ends, at least for now, at Cold Stone Creamery.

WEST KENDALL

BY TORBEN RIISE

My search for the world's best ice cream started 30 years ago.

Rumors of "the Danish ice-cream-o-maniac" had reached my colleague in Connecticut and, one day, he took me to Baskin Robbins. He ordered one scoop for himself and "one scoop of every flavor for this gentleman."

With a look of incredulity, the young woman served up 31 scoops of ice cream in a large bucket. No kidding!

I couldn't believe my good luck, but seven scoops later my stomach surrendered.

Since then, my search has had many high points: a pistachio gelato in Rome, a glace de Cointreau in Paris, a divine mango sherbet in Mumbai, not to mention an "Amerikaner" (an American) in my native city, Copenhagen.

I thought I had tried everything -- until my wife introduced me to **Cold Stone Creamery** whose wonders she had tried in Hawaii. This would top everything, she said.

It did.

From the moment you walk in and are greeted with a genuine "Welcome to Cold Stone; have you visited us before?" until you leave with a "Come back and see us," one enjoys the store's friendly, upbeat atmosphere.

Manager Johnny Martínez at the Creamery at 12536 SW 120th St., talks excitedly about the success of the Arizona-based franchise and how the founders, Donald and Susan Sutherland, after failing to find the ultimate smooth and creamy ice cream they looked for, decided to start their own company producing ice cream.

Said Martínez: "We make the creamy, super-premium ice cream fresh every day -- using the finest ingredients because our customers deserve that!"

“We carry 16 basic flavors, including a lemon sherbet, a few lo-carb varieties and a flavor-of-the-month, but what makes Cold Stone unique is that you can make your own creations by adding nuts, coconut, sprinkles, snickers and a host of other mix-ins.”

The creations are made right there in front of you on the frozen granite slab (you got it: Cold Stone) and is served up in your choice of a freshly made waffle cone or basket. And when customers ask questions or add a tip, the staff breaks into a song.

Asked about the hundreds of paper "slips" that decorate the walls of this creamery, Martínez explained that each represents a customer's donations to the "Make A Wish Foundation" -- a fundraiser that the store runs throughout April.

Pleased with that answer, I thought to myself that, should my diet conscience nag me, I can always justify having consumed that large Chocolate Devotion with a donation to the charity. For now, the search has come to an end -- right here in West Kendall.

It's hard to fathom anyone will ever come up with something better.