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The Pueblo Chieftain
September 28, 2005

Canon City's Cold Stone No. 1 in U.S.

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CANON CITY - The cream of the Cold Stone crop rises in Canon City.

Recently, the Cold Stone Creamery in Canon City emerged as the top-rated Cold Stone in the country after scoring highest in the chain's X-Factor Competition.

In the competition, mystery shoppers visited Cold Stone stores and rated their experience; and franchise representatives conducted their own review of store operations.

The top honor carries \$20,000 in scholarships - to be shared equally by the Canon City store's eight teenaged part-time employees - along with a \$1,500 crew party.

Cold Stone operates 1,200 sites nationwide.

The Canon City store opened 14 months ago.

"To have this honor, having opened July 28 just a little over a year ago, is a credit to our crew. We have the most awesome kids," Canon City store co-owner Jerry Alexander said.

Alexander, a Canon City police officer, and his wife, Arloa, opened the Cold Stone Creamery in the Creekside Shopping Center at 127 Justice Center Road with the help of their adult children.

The family includes Dustin Alexander, a police academy student in Pueblo, and his wife Caitlin; and daughter Jera Dalton and her husband, Chris.

The idea to open the franchise came from a chance visit to an existing Cold Stone in Colorado Springs, during a period when part of the family (the Daltons) lived in Denver, Alexander said.



Cold Stone Creamery in Canon City was recently named the franchise's No. 1 store in the nation, bringing smiles to owners Jerry (left) and Arloa Alexander (right) and worker Libby Holloway (center).

Searching for a meeting point halfway between Canon City and Denver, the family decided upon a Cold Stone shop in Colorado Springs. Afterward, family members often joked of opening their own Cold Stone; and then one day Jera Dalton took the plunge and set up an appointment to meet a Cold Stone representative.

The store in tourist-heavy Canon City proved an instant hit. "The area supports us and our customers have told us they appreciate having this store here," Alexander said.

The Cold Stone name comes from the cold stone that sits behind the counter and serves as the table top where the workers blend by hand the ice cream and "mix-ins" such as nuts, fruit and candy pieces.

The ice cream itself is made fresh every day from natural ingredients.

Cleanliness was among the factors in the Canon City store earning top honors. The floors are kept spotless and the freezers are maintained to look like they were just wheeled in off the showroom floor.

Arloa Alexander said the national chain's cleanliness check was intense. Franchise representatives probed places like the top of a huge 10-foot tall freezer looking for dust but found none, she said.

Cold Stone employees are also expected to entertain customers. The workers sing songs and toss ice cream scoops in the air as if they were flipping pizza dough.

Landing a job at a Cold Stone is competitive. The Alexanders said 160 teens auditioned for the Canon City store's eight part-time positions.

"We just love our kids. They are family and they are important to the success of our store," Arloa Alexander said.

On nights of important teen events, such as homecoming, the teens are given the day off and the six owners take over running the store.

The teens take the job seriously.

Libby Holloway said she has learned how to read people and whether they are having a good or bad day. If she senses a bad day, she said, she works on trying to change that and turn it around for them.

Holloway and her seven co-workers will split the \$20,000 in scholarships evenly - \$2,500 each - and as for the \$1,500 crew party? No, it isn't required the teens make it an ice cream party.

"It is up to the kids to decide what they want to do. If they want to go to the Broadmoor, we'll go to the Broadmoor," Alexander said.

The Cold Stone staff and owners will be officially honored in January at the franchise conference in Las Vegas.