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She's scooping up sweet success

By MATT MONAGHAN

Sure, she says it to everyone, but when Leslie Cook greets you at the Cold Stone Creamery, it feels special.

"Welcome to Cold Stone!" Cook says with a big smile. "Do you see any flavors you want to try?"

Cook, 18, has worked at the ice cream store in the Target shopping center on Center Street for more than two years.

Earlier this year, Cook was one of five employees honored as Outstanding Crew Member of the Year among all the company's employees at 750 nationwide stores.

But owners Jenna and Brian Dieker have a problem: Leslie is going away to college and the Diekers have to begin the search for someone to fill her award-winning shoes.

"We'll miss her passion. Her energy is electric," said Jenna Dieker. "I've told her the door is always open to come back."

Cook's shining example started right from her first interview when she made an unforgettable impression on the Diekers.

"We auditioned about 60 people and Leslie sang the rubber duckie song," said Jenna Dieker. "Then at the end, she gave us a little yellow rubber duckie to remember her by."

Why the rubber duckie song?

"I don't know. I was really nervous, but it's a cute and endearing song, and I'm cute and endearing," Cook said.

All hopefuls be warned: Because of Cook, to get hired at Cold Stone you will have to perform. Jenna Dieker said the added interview process has allowed her to weed out the applicants from those who specifically want to work for Cold Stone.

"A lot of people apply because they just need a job. Then the audition comes along and it's like, you have to be willing to sing and not hold back," she said.



Leslie Cook recently was named a nationwide Outstanding Employee of the Year for her work at Cold Stone Creamery's Center Street NE location. Cook will leave her job Saturday to head to college in Iowa.

Though Cook said she always thought of herself as a shy child growing up, when she's behind the counter whipping up a sweet concoction, she's anything but.

After her introduction, Cook dives into the ice cream with a pair of metal spades that she deftly uses to shape a neatly formed ball.

Then comes her favorite part: adding the toppings which she mashes and mixes together. At the end, if you give her a tip, you're sure to get a song.

With all that, it's no surprise that Jenna Dieker nominated Cook for the award, though Cook needed a little prodding to travel to Las Vegas for the presentation.

"Jenna was so excited that she couldn't wait to tell me so she told me before I went," Cook said. The Diekers also got an award for the Center Street store being recognized as one of the top 50 stores in the company.

But if you want to see Cook in action, you'll have to visit her no later than Saturday. That's her last work day before moving to Iowa to attend college and live with her older sister.

Even if you miss her, however, Cook plans to be back working for Cold Stone again some day.

"I want to go to school and be a marketing major and then hopefully I can come back and do the work behind the scenes like creating the cakes and ice cream flavors," said Cook.

For the Diekers, Cook will leave an everlasting impression that all their future employees will be measured against.

"I'm not sure anybody can replace Leslie," Jenna Dieker says. "She set the bar high for what we expect of our employees."

Cold Stone Creamery

Owners: Jenna and Brian Dieker of Salem.

Salem/Keizer locations: 3910 Center St. NE; 4643 Commercial St. SE; 5063 River Rd. N.

New applicants: To replace Cook, the Diekers will make all applicants perform a talent to stand out.

Contact: Jenna Dieker, (503) 581-6300.