

# The Almanac

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## **Business: Cold Stone Creamery 'experience' comes to Menlo**

*Couple opens the mix-in ice cream store on Santa Cruz Avenue*

By Katie Bearman  
Special to the Almanac

Surrounded by balloons, clowns, and the tempting scent of freshly baked waffle cones, smiling patrons recently celebrated the grand opening of a Cold Stone Creamery ice cream store at 611 N. Santa Cruz Ave. in downtown Menlo Park.

Families, city officials and local business owners chatted during a ribbon-cutting ceremony -- building community bonds over heaping portions of custom-made ice cream.

One of more than 1,000 Cold Stone franchises in the United States, the store specializes in "mix-ins" -- nuts, fruit, baked goods, sauces and brand name candies -- folded into the ice cream for each customer on a frozen slab of granite.

While the ice cream is pricey -- \$3.59 for a 6-ounce scoop with one mix-in, and 69 cents for each additional mix-in -- Cold Stone shops are popular because of the total "ice cream experience," says Jim Yang, who with his wife, Kathy, owns the Menlo Park franchise and another at the Town and Country Village shopping center in Palo Alto.

"Our ice cream is made fresh every day in the store, and it takes longer to prepare because it is custom made," says Mr. Yang. "Employees also greet customers, sing when customers give tips, and actively encourage customers to taste samples."

The Yangs, who live in Mountain View and have a 2-month-old daughter, stress that they want to become an "integral part" of the Menlo Park community.

"Ice cream has broad appeal, and is such a great platform for community outreach," Mr. Yang says. "We partner with community organizations like schools and hold fundraisers, donate to charities and contribute ice cream to nonprofits."

Already the store has held promotions with local schools. Last week, Oak Knoll, Encinal, Laurel and Hillview schools received 25 percent of proceeds from sales to customers who said they are affiliated with the schools.

### ***MBA delight***

Mr. Yang, who has an MBA from Stanford and works as a director of product management at Yahoo, says he and his wife were attracted to the idea of owning and operating their own business. The brand was attractive, too, because it reduces the risk and effort involved in drawing customers.

"I see a growing trend in MBA students interested in pursuing franchising opportunities," Mr. Yang says, adding that former classmates have contacted him to discuss the pros and cons of the business. Getting into a small businesses is a great way to achieve financial independence and self-sufficiency, he told the Almanac.

Winning a Cold Stone franchise is no small deal, however. Of 29,000 applicants for the franchise last year, only 1 percent were granted, the company says.

Mr. Yang says he thinks he and Kathy won the franchises because of their marketing and customer-service experience, and because they plan to be active operators. Ms. Yang oversees the stores' day-to-day operations.

The Menlo Park store replaced Huston's Card Shop, whose owners, residents of Los Altos, said they decided to look for a new location.

### ***Divided family***

One family that attended the Menlo Park store's June 9 private opening party has split allegiances when it comes to ice cream.

The dad, Paul Evans of Palo Alto, told the Almanac he has been an avid Baskin-Robbins ice cream-eater from an early age.

"My dad took me to Basin-Robbins every Saturday when I was a little kid," he says. And he has continued the tradition by taking his 13-year-old son, Eric, to Baskin-Robbins almost every week. One the other hand, Mr. Evans' wife, Carol, says she is a Cold Stone enthusiast.

Eric declined to state a preference, but says he likes Cold Stone because the employees mix the ingredients in front of the customers.

"It's all part of the entertainment," he says as he savors a generous helping of Sweet Cream ice cream loaded with chocolate chips, Double Oreo and fudge.