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Ice cream chain coming to State Street

By Jeff Richgels

Another chain eatery is headed to State Street. Cold Stone Creamery, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based chain of ice cream shops, plans to open at 427 State St., as well as at 1651 Deming Way in the Greenway Station development in Middleton. The Middleton site, which is scheduled to open in September, has previously been reported, but the State Street store, which is scheduled to open about a month later, has not.

The space at 427 State St. previously was Pop Records Studios, a karaoke-type business that offered customers a chance to record their own compact disc.

Cold Stone is all about the "experience," said Rick Fossali, franchisee for the Madison area.

Cold Stone stores make 16 varieties of super premium ice cream and several varieties of yogurt daily, and offer a range of mix-ins such as pieces of candy, cookies, nuts and pie fillings. Customers select their own flavors and mix-ins and then watch as their concoction is created before them on frozen granite slabs, to be served in fresh-baked cones or dishes. Store employees sometimes sing while they work.

"It's a combination of the quality of the product and the experience," Fossali said. "In a traditional shop you pick from the flavors that are already made. With Cold Stone you get to custom create what you want."

"There's no end to what you can produce," added Dale Johnson, Cold Stone area developer for Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The formula has created a booming company that is among the fastest growing franchises in the nation.

According to the company Web site - www.coldstonecreamery.com - the first Cold Stone Creamery was opened by Donald and Susan Sutherland in Tempe, Ariz., in 1988, with the first franchise store following seven years later in Tucson.

Privately held Cold Stone now has more than 400 stores open in 38 states and the Caribbean, with franchising deals made that will give Cold Stone more than 900 stores in 46 states and the Caribbean within the next couple of years.

Entrepreneur magazine in its May issue rated Cold Stone No. 35 on its list of the nation's 100 fastest growing franchises, up from 54th a year ago. Cold Stone says its stores average \$358,000 in annual sales.



Cold Stone Creamery, which will be opening stores on State Street and in Middleton, offers 16 varieties of super premium ice cream and several varieties of yogurt made fresh daily, along with a range of mix-ins such as pieces of candy, cookies, nuts and pie fillings. Customers select their own flavors and mix-ins and then watch as their concoction is created before them on frozen granite slabs, to be served in fresh-baked cones or dishes. Store employees sometimes sing while they work.

Cold Stone entered the Milwaukee area with two stores earlier this year and plans to open 10 more stores across the state - including the two in the Madison area - over the next two years.

Fossali, a Middleton High School graduate, and his wife, Susan, a Madison East graduate, spent the last 17 years working for McDonald's in mid-management. The last decade was spent out west, and they first encountered Cold Stone while in Colorado.

"Every Sunday night we took the kids out for ice cream," Fossali said. "And once Cold Stone opened down the street we never went anywhere else."

The Fossalis were looking to move back to the Madison area and franchising Cold Stone "seemed to fit well," so they made the deal and moved back here in April.

"We're picky and want to deliver the same kind of experience we look for," Fossali said. Pricing hasn't been set but probably will be comparable to Culver's, he said.

With the growing presence and success of chains such as Starbucks and Chipotle on State Street, Fossali expects to find success there, even though Chocolate Shoppe, 468 State St., and Chocolate Coyote, 341 State St., provide plenty of nearby competition.

"I'm not really worried too much," he said. "I think our product is unique. I think it's going to fit in perfectly. I'm not concerned about the nuances of doing business on State Street."

Eventually, Fossali aims to have four or five Cold Stones in the Madison area, with the east side and south side being two logical additional sites.

"We want to get these two open and see how it goes," he said. "If it's like everywhere else, things should go exceptionally well."