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HERE'S THE SCOOP: SERVING ICE CREAM COMES WITH A SONG

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PRINCESS ANNE - Some folks sing for their supper, but for their dessert?

A new notion to Virginia Beach - ice cream and a song - is coming in mid-March, when Cold Stone Creamery opens in Red Mill Commons near Strawbridge.

The concept goes beyond just scooping ice cream into a cone.

Customers choose a flavor of ice cream, yogurt or Italian sorbet (all made daily in each store), and select from 40 mix-ins, including candies, fruits and nuts.

The selections are blended on a granite stone chilled to 15 degrees Fahrenheit, then scooped into a waffle cone or waffle bowl, or formed into a personalized cake or pie.

All of this is done while workers croon to customers with ice cream-themed songs and dance behind the counter.

The first Cold Stone Creamery opened in Arizona in 1988. Today, the chain has more than 300 stores in 40 states and the Virgin Islands. The Red Mill Commons store will be the first in South Hampton Roads. One operates in Newport News.

The creamery auditions its prospective employees by asking applicants to stand before their peers and break into impromptu song and dance.

Company managers held auditions at Kellam, Landstown and Ocean Lakes high schools, as well as Princess Anne Recreation Center.

Of 100 would-be songsters interviewed, about 20 will initially be hired, said Tony Burnett, local store manager.

"We've got the best ice cream in the world, but it is also the kids that work here that make the experience for the customers," Burnett said. "They aren't just working, they are having a blast, singing and dancing."

Auditions included breaking the ice with introductions, short dances, individual singing and a group performance of singing and choreography.

"We're looking for crew members that can carry a tune, be fun and creative, have an outgoing personality, and make a quick connection with people," Burnett said.

Senior Sarah Gayle, 17, auditioned Feb. 26 at Ocean Lakes High.

"I sing at the restaurant I work at now, and they yell at me," said the Red Mill resident, who will be majoring in music at college next fall. "I think this would be the ideal job for me."

Sarah looks at the job as not just a chance to earn some money, but a start to her performing arts career.

"This will surely give me experience singing before others," she said. "It should loosen any inhibitions I may have performing in front of people. It would be hard to have stage fright after singing for people stuffing their faces with ice cream."

Ocean Lakes senior Sam Cupper, 18, said his current job is repetitious, and finds the concept of **Cold Stone** Creamery appealing.

"I think it would be something different every day," said the teen, a Hunt Club Forest resident. "I think it will be a lot of fun."

Senior Rosemary Woods, 18, has been in chorus since fourth grade, she said.

"I love to sing. I love ice cream. I'd be getting paid for this. It's great," said the Red Mill resident.

The creamery has a soft opening Thursday and a grand opening in April.

Students showed their creativity during the interview by altering song lyrics to be themed toward ice cream. For example, Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" became "I Will Always Love Ice Cream." The Supremes' "Stop In The Name Of Love" became "Stop In The Name Of Cold Stone." Disco even struck a chord, with lyrics sung to Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive."

After having about four minutes to develop and scribble their renditions on paper, each applicant sang.

"It's fun, creative, and enthusiastic," said Holly Sunderland, Ocean Lakes High choral director. "It's a wonderful opportunity for the children to show their creativity and to really shine."

* For more information, visit www.coldstonecreamery.com

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