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## **Creamy scoops, mix-ins create Cold Stone's different flavor**

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Call it a gimmick if you want, but Susan and Praveen Prasad say the ice cream at the Cold Stone Creamery in Brick is different from the ice cream you'll find at other ice cream shops. In fact, it's even prepared a different way.

Instead of just offering scoops of different flavors piled atop one another, Cold Stone Creamery employees mix together different flavors on a granite stone chilled to 16 degrees. It is neither soft-serve nor hard-packed, but a creamy something in between. And it all takes place right in front of the consumer.

"We wanted to do something different that's fun," Praveen Prasad said last week, explaining why he and his wife decided to become franchisees for the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based chain. "We love ice cream."

Mixing different flavors and toppings result in Cold Stone's "creations," which taste like other desserts. A customer can choose "Black Forest Dream," a combination of cherry pie filling, brownie and fudge, for example, or "Breathless Boston Cream Pie," a combination of sponge cake, fudge and whipped topping, or "Cookie Doughn't You Want Some," which is cookie dough, chocolate chips, fudge and caramel.

They opened the shop at Cedar Bridge Avenue and Brick Boulevard in August. Susan Prasad, a 39-year-old former business analyst for Merrill Lynch in Somerset, is the full-time operator of the shop. Her husband, a 40-year-old former network developer for Lucent Technologies and then Tellium Inc., continues to work full-time for Booz Allen Hamilton in Eatontown as a consultant for government.

Eatontown is also the location of the only other Cold Stone Creamery in Monmouth and Ocean counties. Partners Jeff Rossi and Tim Hines opened their franchise in the food court at the Monmouth Mall in October.

"I tried the product, and I fell in love with it," said the 37-year-old Rossi, who works full-time as a director of sales development for T.D. Waterhouse in New York. "I've always been a fanatic about ice cream, and I never tasted anything like this."

Hines, a 37-year-old former sales executive for a shipping company, is the full-time operator of the Eatontown shop. Rossi and Hines have been friends since childhood.

Each of the two stores have about 25 full-time and part-time employees, mostly teenagers who sing songs or pep chants for customers as they make the concoctions.

"We try to make the customer feel they are getting a good product and an experience," Susan Prasad said.

She is expecting the couple's third child in January, when she will turn the shop over to an assistant manager for awhile.

The Cold Stone concept was created by Donald and Susan Sutherland, who opened the first Cold Stone Creamery in Tempe, Ariz., in 1988. The company opened its first franchise in Tucson, Ariz., in 1995.

As of October, the company had grown to 500 stores. The majority are in the West, but the chain extends to 41 states. Revenue for 2003, as of October, had topped \$100 million, compared with \$88.1 million in for all of 2002, according to the company. There are six franchises in New Jersey. The Prasads, who live in Wall, plan to open franchises in Wall and Ocean Township in the spring of 2004 with Praveen's 33-year-old brother, Neal, as a partner. The Wall shop will be on Route 35, near A & S Italian Import Deli. The Ocean Township location will be in the strip mall south of Seaview Square, on Route 66.

They also plan to open another shop in Dover Township in 2005. Meanwhile, another franchise being built by another franchisee is under construction in Marlboro, according to the company's Web site.