

APPLAUSE!

Q & A with Rena & Ron Schrein – Cold Stone Franchisees



All About Kids & Community

Rena and Ron Schrein have been Cold Stone franchisees for nearly three and a half years and own a single store in Aberdeen, North Carolina. Their whole business philosophy is, “It’s All About Kids and Community.” This strategy has worked very well for them; so well that even in these challenging economic times, their store is up in Same Store Sales YTD by 18 percent!

Both Rena and Ron come from advertising/marketing backgrounds. In 1989, Rena founded a marketing consulting firm and still continues today as President. She also serves as a marketing consultant to Cold Stone’s National Advisory Board. After a long career in advertising, Ron went back to school to become a Certified Surgical Technologist. He was working at Chapel Hill’s UNC Hospital in the operating room when they first got involved with Cold Stone and eventually left that job to take over the store in Aberdeen. Ron still works part time as a Surgical Technologist at the local hospital in Pinehurst and feels it’s just one more way to strengthen their ties to the community.

We invite you to enjoy the following Q&A session where you can get to know more about the Schreins and how they are achieving such great success.



What attracted you to Cold Stone?

Ron: We originally wanted to open our own “mom and pop” 50’s style rock ‘n roll “malt shop.” Lacking the business background to start such a venture from scratch, we began looking at franchises where the business systems would be provided. We found Cold Stone on the Internet.

Rena: Wanted a safe place where kids could enjoy themselves and hang with friends. Going out for ice cream was always our way of celebrating all the little and big accomplishments in life. We’d frequent Dairy Queen with our daughter, open the back of the van, sit and just hang out toasting to the day’s achievements or cheering us up after a not-so-perfect day.

How do you set yourselves apart from your competitors?

Ron: At our store, it’s all about kids and community. We participated in 100 fundraisers in 2008, in addition, we did 30 non-fundraiser special events. We own two cool carts, and we go everywhere. (Note: The Schreins scoop Like It ice cream in French Vanilla, Chocolate, Strawberry, Cotton Candy and Cake Batter. They bring fudge, caramel, sprinkles, chocolate chips and M&Ms for mix-ins. They’ve also done sundae and smoothie bars.) We donate thousands of dollars to schools and churches who invite us to participate in their events to raise money. We knew from the outset that success lay outside the four walls.

Rena: We are extremely involved in the community doing fundraisers in-store and out in the community. We try never to say ‘no.’ Even if we think it may not be a large revenue producer, we go to support the group. We bring free ice cream to the marching band when they return from their 2-week summer camp and to the local high school Thespian Society at their award ceremony. Also, we organize events for the shopping center to provide activities for kids and their families such as the Halloween Parade we did this past year.

How do you select your fundraisers and special events?

Ron: They select us. In our first year, we spent a lot of time reaching out to groups and offering to help raise money. The word spread quickly and now they call us. I keep last year’s calendar on the wall and every month I call everyone for whom we did an event last year to make sure they invite us back. Many of these are run by the school PTA and the leadership changes each year, so you have to call them because the new leaders don’t always know or remember what we did the previous year.

Tell us about some of the events you do.

Ron: Almost every school PTA has a “Fall Festival” or a “Spring Fling” mini-carnival to raise money. We try to go to all of them. The two biggest events we do are the U.S. Kids Golf World Championship

Meet The Schrein’s



Rena

Hometown:
Caseyville, Illinois

Education:
BA in Marketing

Family:
Husband, daughter, 3 step-children and 4 grandsons

Pets:
3 dogs – Putter, Lucky and Chrissy. Lucky and Chrissy are rescue dogs.

First Job:
Waitress at age 15

Hobby:
Staying fit, studying nutrition, exercise

FAVORITES

Cold Stone Creation:
Chocolate Devotion™

Movie:
Wizard of Oz

Book:
Gift from the Sea by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

City:
New York, Chicago, San Francisco

Meal to serve to friends:
fresh fish, wild rice, fresh vegetables

Ron

Hometown:
Toldeo, Ohio

Education:
BA in Journalism, Univ. of Toledo; Associate’s in Surgical Technology, Sandhills Community College

First Job:
Grocery “carryout boy” at age 16

Hobby:
Model trains; playing the drums for my own amusement and the annoyance of everyone else; golf

FAVORITES

Cold Stone Creation:
Founder’s Favorite®

Movie:
Godfather I and II

Book:
anything by John D. McDonald, Ed McBain or Carl Hiassen

City:
New York, Chicago, San Francisco

Meal to serve to friends:
anything off the grill or breaded chicken breasts with rice and vegetables

at the world-renowned Pinehurst Golf Resort and the Union Pines High School Marching Band Viking Classic, a marching band competition featuring more than 20 schools. We also do a cake fundraiser with the marching band that sold 364 cakes and netted them \$1,350 and more than \$6,000 for the store (see sidebar below).

What are some ways you motivate your crew members?

Ron: We try to make it fun for them. We try to keep them excited about working for Cold Stone and not let the excitement they feel at the beginning fade away. We have crew members that have been here between 2 and 3 years and 3 college kids who came back to work this summer. They enjoy it here, and we really are a part of their extended family.

Rena: In addition to Ron's comments, I believe they appreciate how much we really care about them. They know we are there for them.



What has been your biggest challenge as a small business owner?

Ron: I'm a marketer and an advertiser. I'm not good at accounting and "crunching the numbers" but, thankfully, Cold Stone helps with that and Brian Kiel in particular has been an enormous help to us.

What are you most proud of professionally?

Ron: I'm very proud of the work I do in the hospital operating room. Believe it or not, it's a break from the long days at Cold Stone that refreshes me and gets

me psyched up at the store. After that, I'm proud that we've made the right decisions on growing the store's business through community involvement and that even though we're a small market store, we're in the top 10 or 15 in many of the measurement categories among the 55 NC/SC stores and that as of this interview, we're currently up in SSS YTD by 18%.

Rena: That we make a difference in our kids' (crew) lives. We attend the events our kids (crew) are involved in—their plays, concerts, etc. We celebrate their accomplishments and have helped them find cars, so they are able to work more hours and can go on to community college. We help them understand money and the impact of finance charges, setting up a bank account and establishing a savings account. We believe it takes a community to raise a child, and we try to fill in where their home life may have challenges. Some of our kids are totally responsible for themselves. They buy their own food, clothes, school supplies and are responsible for finding their own way to and from the store. We provide support and transportation when needed and are there when they need to talk, simply because kids shouldn't have to shoulder the full responsibility of growing up themselves.

What do you find most rewarding about your job?

Ron: Making moms and dads smile when we do something nice for their kids. If we tease the kids or make them laugh, we see the reward on mom's face...and she comes back for more!

Rena: Working with the kids and sitting down with them to discuss their concerns and help them focus on the many good things in life, particularly when things may not seem so rosy at the time.

How has the current economy changed the way you do business?

Ron: We're sticking with the strategy that has worked so well and gotten us where we are. That's why we're up 18% so far this year. Any other gimmick that a competitor comes up with will ultimately wear thin and die out, but supporting kids, schools and churches will always be our niche and our reputation in the community (along with having the best ice cream!). We own this position and someone will have a very tough time trying to take it away from us.



What advice would you share with other franchisees?

Ron: Get a Cool Cart and get out the door and start visiting your local schools. Talk to the school secretary and find out who the president of the PTA is. Ask about their fundraisers and who advises the clubs. Talk to the athletic director and get the schedule for football and basketball games. Get someone to agree to let you take ice cream to an event; sell it and donate a percentage back to the school, church, club or team. The word will get around quickly.

What's next for you?

Ron: Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory. Our store will be converted in July, and we can't wait to shock the town (and the competition) when they hear about this incredible one-two punch of the ultimate indulgence in ice cream and chocolate. 🍫

These links will help you appreciate the scope of the U.S. Kids golf event, especially the YouTube video. We give coupons for a free Love It Creation to every player at the event.
<http://homeofgolf.blast.com/golf/home/uskidsgolf.htm>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEC5WWcmd84>

SIDEBAR