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Published: June 17, 2011

Updated: June 18, 2011 - 3:26 PM

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Cold Stone Creamery is returning to Hernando

By Tony Holt

The local Cold Stone Creamery shut down three years ago in spite of solid business.

When the economy tanked, it didn't appear as though a comeback was possible.

But one Central Florida businessman who owns a series of Cold Stone stores along the Orlando-Ocala corridor is remodeling and reopening the store along State Road 50 near High Point.

Vijay Dattani expects to recapture a large share of the ice cream market in and around Brooksville.

"This store does very well in smaller towns," he said. "We sell a great product."

Dattani, 29, said the previous owner was forced to shut down because of health reasons. He started eyeing the location between Brooksville and Weeki Wachee after someone in the corporate office brought it to his attention late last year.

He spoke with the landlord and began making moves toward a pre-July 4 opening.

An official date has not yet been announced for the grand opening, but Dattani said he expects to have it ready prior to Independence Day.

Cold Stone sells 20 flavors at a time with 40 or more different mixings. The creations seem endless, he said.

Statistics have shown the ice cream retail industry has not fallen significantly like other food and beverage chains since the economy started its tailspin a few years ago.

Dessert is an indulgence, one people don't like to give up. In fact, they sometimes indulge more when times are bad.

"If people don't take a vacation, they're always going to end up going to the movies and going out to get ice cream after the movies," said Dattani, who pointed out his store's proximity to two local movie theaters. "We're not recession-proof, but we're probably more resistant. The effect we see is a little less than most."

Cold Stone was created in 1988 in Tempe, Ariz. Since then, more than 1,400 stores have opened, according to the company's website.

Since its origin, the goal at Cold Stone is to provide authentic ice cream that tastes better and creamier than store-bought brands and other upstart chains. Additionally, there are some low-fat flavors offered at Cold Stone, including a blueberry pomegranate yogurt that has taken off in other parts of the country, Dattani said.

One of the signature flavors offered at the store is the cake batter selection. Dattani said the chain has sold 40 million pans of it since it was created 10 years ago.

The store also offers smoothies, hot desserts, funnel cakes, brownies and other dessert choices.

A manager already has been selected for the store. Dattani said he hopes to hire roughly 35 employees.

To apply, people can send their resumes to jobs@dattanicorp.com.