

SWEET TREATS ACROSS AMERICA

Nationwide shipping next step in ice cream shop's growth strategy

■ Cowabunga Ice Cream figured out how to successfully ship its ice cream — still cold — to the rest of the country.

By KEVIN POST
Business Editor

Cowabunga Ice Cream has done well since opening in 2009 in Forked River, selling very indulgent frozen treats to people in the area.



SCHACK

But owner Ellen Schack, 45, of Lacey Township, realized that if the business were to grow, it would have to reach beyond the local market somehow.

She consulted with a business coach and a marketing/branding firm, Ascendant Strategy Group of Delaware, and came up with a pretty radical idea for the ice cream business: Ship nationwide.

Most people find it challenging to get through a two-scoop cone in summer without the product melting and dripping all over their hands.

But quick shipping, cheaper insulating materials and online marketing have evolved to make selling handmade, hand-packed ice cream by mail to the continental U.S. possible, Schack said.

As a test, she shipped 2½ gallons of ice cream to her son in Seattle.

"When it got there, all the ice cream was still frozen and there was enough dry ice left to play with," she said.

Schack said she expects there will be sufficient demand for her high-end ice cream, based on requests from summer visitors who have discovered it at the retail store on Manchester Avenue.

Cowabunga Ice Cream reopened for the season Friday, offering customers very rich versions of classic flavors and specialties.

Schack said that for mail-order delivery, the company will focus on the 16 most popular flavors — a dozen of ice cream and four of frozen yogurt. Two of the frozen yogurts are fat-free, and all feature active yogurt cultures, for those wanting a healthier treat.

For customers preferring something as decadent as possible, the ice creams are made with the highest butter fat content bases and the most lavish inclusions Schack could find.

Beyond the classics, Cowabunga offers Death by Chocolate ("Everything chocolate we can find we put in there, including chocolate crunchies, fudge and chocolate chips," she said); rice crispy treat, with marshmallow and puffed rice; and Almond Joy, coconut-flavored ice cream with almonds and chocolate chips.

All of the ice cream is made at the store in 5-gallon batches, creamy and with no added air, Schack said.

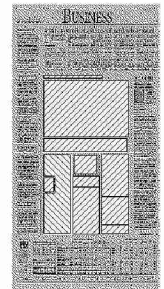
Custom flavors can be made by request, and require a purchase of at least 5 gallons.

"One customer said he had called all over the state looking for butter-scotch ice cream for his father visiting from India," she said. "We made it for him and his father said it was the best he ever had."

Cowabunga started shipping nationwide in February, by ground to nearby states and by two-day air elsewhere.

The ice cream is still packed by hand and then boxed with about 5 pounds of dry ice, which isn't cheap, Schack said.

So far, the store has been schedul-



ing shipments and picking up dry ice as needed, since it disintegrates quickly even at normal freezer temperatures, she said.

When demand picks up, a dry ice company will place "a large super-cooler" at the store to keep a supply on hand, she said.

National sales year-round will also mean that Cowabunga Ice Cream is available locally in all seasons.

Schack said that when the retail store closes in the fall, customers will still be able to order pints and

quarts for pickup.

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Cowabunga Ice Cream

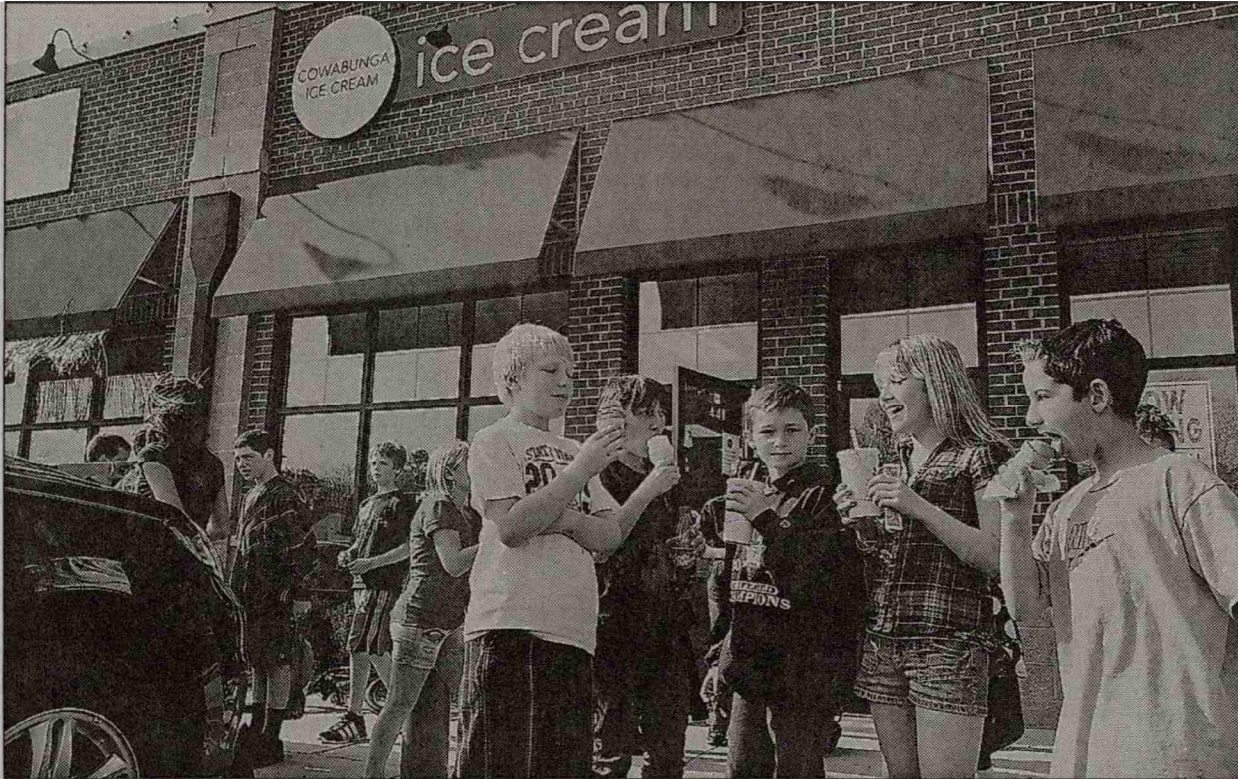
Location: 44 Manchester Ave.,
Forked River

Owners: Ellen and Ed Schack, of
Lacey Township

Started: 2009

Employees: Six

Phone: 609-971-3453



Staff photo by Ben Fogletto

Children gather on Friday with their ice cream at Cowabunga Ice Cream's opening day in Forked River.