

One Cool Job

By Danielle S. Hammelef

What do you want to be when you grow up? A teacher? A doctor? An astronaut? How about an ice-cream taster?

Yes, there really is a job where you can get paid to taste ice cream. Just ask John Harrison, an "Official Taste Tester" at Dreyer's/Edy's Ice Cream for the past 21 years. Testing helps manufacturers to be sure of a product's quality. During his career Harrison has been responsible for approving over 200 million gallons of the sweet creamy dessert—as well as for developing over 75 flavors.

Harrison hadn't always wanted to be in the ice-cream business. As a kid, he'd wanted to be a fire fighter or a police officer, among other careers.

But ice cream runs in his family. "It was like I fell into a batch of ice cream," he says, chuckling. Four generations of Harrisons have been "in" ice cream, including his great-grandfather, who owned two ice-cream parlors in New York City in the 1880s, his father, who owned a dairy-ingredients factory in Georgia, and his uncle, who owned an ice-cream factory in Tennessee. At his uncle's factory, he "tasted and ate" his way through high school and college as he learned how to make ice cream. He likes to joke that ice cream is so much a part of his

How many licks does it take to finish off a single-scoop ice-cream cone? . . . It depends in part on how big the scoop is, but approximately fifty.

life that his blood "runs sixteen percent butterfat."

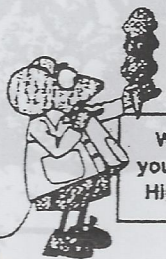
A Day in Dessert

Some people think that it would be easy to do this job; after all, you just have to like ice cream, right? Nope—there's more to the job than that, says Harrison, who has a degree in chemistry. He points out that a dairy or food-science degree would be very useful to someone wanting a career in this "cool" field.

In a typical morning on the job, Harrison tastes and evaluates 60

ice-cream samples—3 each from the 20 flavor batches produced the previous day. Starting with vanilla and working up to stronger flavors like mint chocolate-chip, he slices open each container.

Then he lets the ice cream warm up to about 12 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature in the storage freezer is -20 degrees. Most people eat ice cream at between 0 and 5 degrees. But cold ice cream can numb the taste buds, Harrison explains, so "You get more flavor from warmer ice



What flavor would you invent? Tell us on HighlightsKids.com.

cream, which is why some kids like to stir it, creating ice-cream soup."

Tasting with Your Eyes

While the ice cream warms up, Harrison looks over the samples and grades each one on its appearance. "Tasting begins with the eyes," he explains. He checks to see if the ice cream is attractive and asks himself, "Does the product have the color expected from that flavor?" If there are added goodies in the ice cream, such as fruit, chocolate chips, nuts, or fudge ribbons, he makes sure that they are evenly spread throughout and that the sample doesn't have too much or too little of the added ingredients.

Next it's time to taste! With his gold-plated spoon, which he uses to avoid the aftertaste plastic or wood can give, Harrison skims the top of the sample, where it's warmest. Then he turns the spoon upside down and plops the spoonful onto his tongue.

Swirl, Smack, and ...

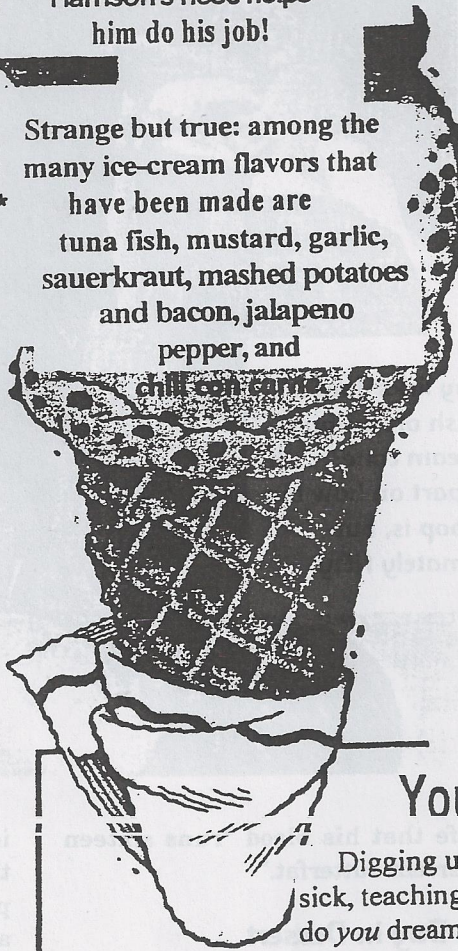
"I've developed a way of tasting called the Three S's," he says. "First, I *swirl* the ice cream very quickly around in my mouth, completely coating my taste buds. Then I *smack* my mouth several times very fast to warm up the ice cream even more and to add air, to release the maximum flavor." While swirling and smacking, he tastes for balance between the cream, the natural flavors, and the sweetening ingredients, and he checks to be sure that the ice-cream texture is smooth and creamy, not icy or gummy.

You might expect *swallow* to be the third S in his tasting method, but it's not. "We eat for nutrition,"

judging by sales, the most popular ice-cream flavor in the U.S. is vanilla, and the second is chocolate.

Taste-test a food while holding your nose. How well can you taste a food if you can't smell it? John Harrison's nose helps him do his job!

Strange but true: among the many ice-cream flavors that have been made are tuna fish, mustard, garlic, sauerkraut, mashed potatoes and bacon, jalapeno pepper, and chili con carne.



Harrison says. "Swallowing isn't necessary to taste ice cream." After about three to five seconds of swirling and smacking, he demonstrates the third S—he *spits* out the sample into a bucket. "That's the worst part of my job," he sighs, "spitting out the ice cream."

The Taste of Success

But that doesn't mean he never eats ice cream. Harrison swallows one bite of each new flavor, to test the aftertaste.

At home and "off-duty," he eats whatever flavors he chooses—and more than just one bite! Vanilla is his favorite. He enjoys making his own ice cream and swirling goodies into it. "We're all kids when it comes to ice cream," he says.

Both at work and in leisure time, Harrison is always on the lookout for new flavor ideas that might succeed commercially. The most popular flavor he has developed so far is cookies and cream.

Continuing to think up new ideas, try out new flavors, and test samples from so many batches of ice cream each day keeps Harrison busy but happy—working at one cool job.

Your Dream Job!

Digging up dinosaur bones, helping the sick, teaching music, building bridges ... what do you dream of doing as an adult? We want to know!

Share your "dream job" with us, and tell us why you've chosen it. Please keep your response under one hundred words. Mail it to

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Be sure to include your name, age, and complete address. We must receive your work by August 1, 2004.

J.

