

Free water ice keeps first day of spring cool

By GREG WEBBER
Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER — High winds and cool temperatures Thursday did not hide a common harbinger of the first day of spring.

In keeping with its tradition, Rita's Water Ice offered free small water ices to anyone who was willing to risk being blown away by the wind.

A line quickly formed at noon at the East Gay Street store, and was around the block by 7 p.m.

Ashley D'Emidio, the manager of the store at that time, said they were going through plenty of water ice, but had enough reserves to last the whole day. Rita's in West Chester doesn't close until 9:30 p.m. in the spring.

"Last year we went through 74 tubs, and this year we expect to go through 80," D'Emidio said. Each tub holds 13 quarts of water ice. Three large machines in the back of the store process the

mix and add sugar.

"I started making the stuff last night at seven," D'Emidio said.

One reason the staff is expecting to go through more tubs this year is the introduction of a deal on gelatis. For \$1, customers could upgrade their free water ice to one small gelati of any flavor.

Five people, including D'Emidio, staffed the store in the evening, and all of them were busy. When not taking or filling orders, they mopped the wet floor and manned the mixing machines.

Despite the cold and a 15-minute wait, everyone seemed cheerful about the start of spring. Most were bundled up in jackets and boots, though at least one woman came out in flip-flops. The only people wearing T-shirts were Rita's employees, many of them with long sleeves underneath.

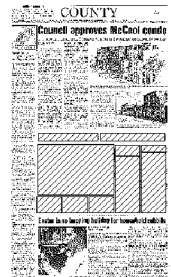
While most of those waiting in line were teenagers, usually in groups, there were

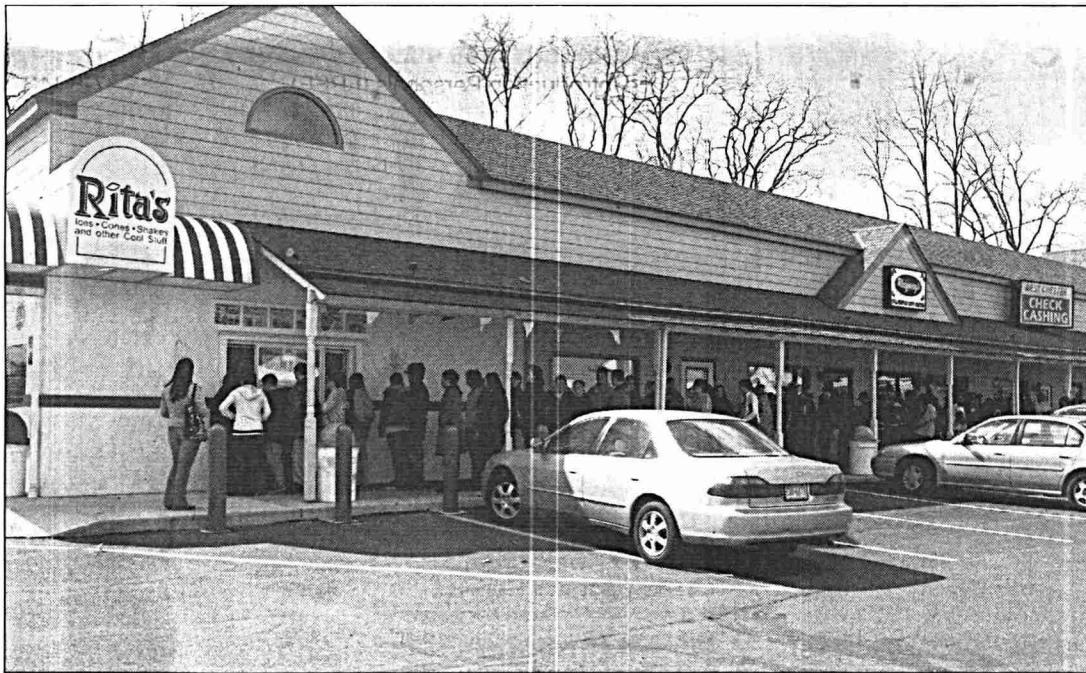
whole families out to enjoy their free taste of spring. Small children seemed unaware of the temperature as they anticipated getting a treat.

One unidentified woman said she wasn't out for the free water ice, but was spending quality time with her son and felt like having some Rita's. She was wearing a large fur hood and heavy jacket as she stood patiently as the line inched forward.

"I'm excited to be out here," said Amanda, who didn't provide her last name. "Even though it's cold, it's free. It's worth it." She got her favorite flavor, pink lemonade.

Happy as they were to get their free water ice, the crowds did not hang around. Apart from one or two shivering patrons, most people headed straight for their cars. While spring has officially begun, the weather hasn't taken the hint yet.





Staff photo by Larry McDevitt

People line up for their free Rita's Water Ice on Thursday on East Gay Street in West Chester.