

RITA'S SPRING TRADITION: ICE IS ON US

Free treats mark start of season

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VINELAND — The weather didn't feel like spring Thursday with temperatures in the low 50s and wind and clouds hanging around most of the day, but lines at area Rita's Water Ice stands were steady throughout the day.

Even as strong winds blew samples from John Franzoi's tray, patrons sought a taste of the new season via the traditional free first day of spring water ice.

"It's an exciting day," the owner of the South Delsea Drive location said. "Even though it's cold and windy, it lets everyone know we're open for the season."

Across town, the Landis Avenue location went

through 35 buckets of ice by late afternoon, said owner Lou Cicchitti. With 44 regular size cups in each bucket, 1,540 free ices were handed out.

With as many as 3,000 customers expected to grab a free sample at Franzoi's shop, the rite of spring could cost him as much as \$1,600, but he said it's a business ven-

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ture worth every penny because "it all comes back."

The entire Rita's franchise expected to dole out more than 1 million free servings Thursday across its 500 locations.

Franzoi also spent the day encouraging customers to try a new coffee and vanilla custard combo called the Ritaccino, or

the Slenderita, a fat-free coffee or strawberry custard, or one of five new flavors available this season: Birthday Cake.

Other new flavors patrons

will see this year are Sweet Tea, Georgia Peach, Key Lime, and Pumpkin Pie. If the weather lets him stay open through October, Franzoi said he might even try to get Egg Nog on the menu. He'll do what he can so his business lives up to its new slogan: "Ice, Custard and Happiness."

Tim Zimmer, of Franklinville, brought his wife, three daughters, and son to the summer hot spot. Dressed in winter wear, he said the temperature wasn't going to keep him and his family away.

"Every day's a step closer to some warmer weather," Zimmer said.





Staff photo/Barbara Erickson

Howard Nash III, 7, and his sister, Antoinette Nash, 10, of Newtonville, eat complimentary water ice at Rita's on Delsea Drive in Vineland on Thursday.



Staff photo/Craig Matthews

Kate Slobodenko, 18, serves water ice to Carmelita Graham, 28, of Vineland and her daughter Imahri, 3, Thursday at Rita's Water Ice on Landis Avenue in Vineland.