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NONPROFITS

• Industry roundup

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Earl "Sticks" Brown,
Owner / CEO
Sticks Brown Group /
Radiant Ride

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Fresno EOC tops the list of
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QUENCH THIRST, GIVE BACK

Family embraces charitable snow cone biz

Ben Keller – STAFF WRITER

It was more than just seeing happy crowds enjoying tasty cups of shaved ice that drew Fresno residents Ray and Amanda Asklof to Kona Ice.

As the new Valley franchise of the Kentucky-based snow cone chain, driving a round Fresno and

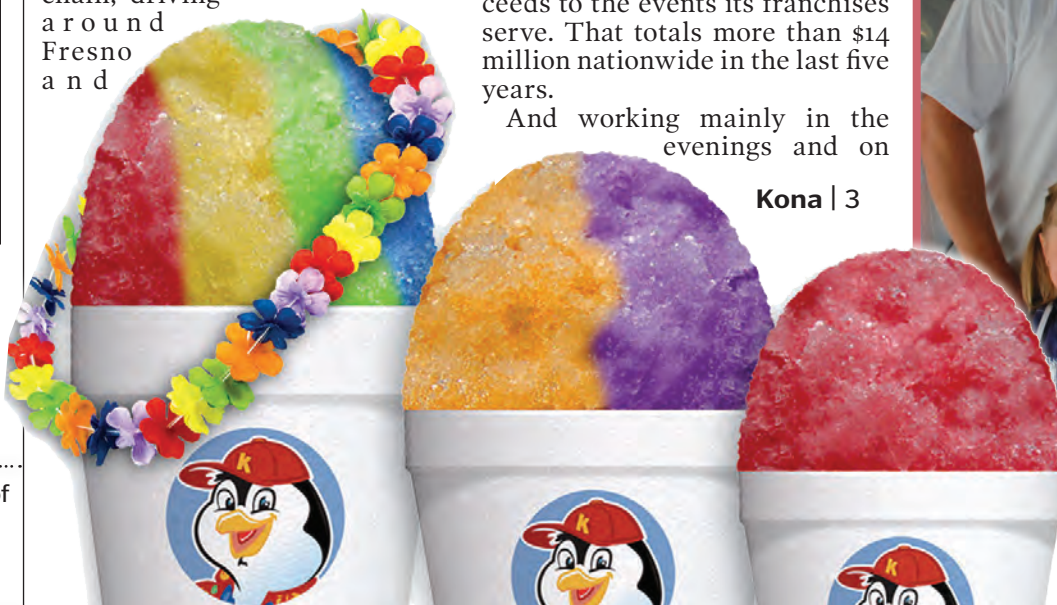
Madera selling America's favorite frozen treat was a literal chance to give back to the community.

The couple has donated nearly \$1,000 to area schools and organizations since investing in their Kona Ice truck in March, living up to the company's principles of giving back a portion of its proceeds to the events its franchises serve. That totals more than \$14 million nationwide in the last five years.

And working mainly in the evenings and on



BEN KELLER | From left, Ray, Reagan, Payton and Amanda Asklof make up the Fresno-Madera Kona Ice team.



Kona | 3

Climate change has water experts concerned

Chuck Harvey – STAFF WRITER

Speaking at the recent Water Technology Conference in Clovis, national, state and local water and sustainability experts warned that time is running out to replace Valley groundwater supplies that have been lost because of drought and overdraft.

They warned that climate change could lead to longer drought periods in the Central Valley and that it would become more difficult to obtain water from distant locations.

The speakers urged action to develop a local multi-strategy plan to capture as much water as possible for ground percolation to rejuvenate the aquifer. It is considered vital to prevent problems from ground cracking and sinking as subsurface water levels fall.

"You have to measure, monitor, model and manage," said Andrew Stone, executive director of New Hampshire-based American Groundwater Trust discussing the ability to maintain good wells. "Or do you want more desecration cracks and depletion of water?"

He said that although an integrated water management plan is costly, it does work and water supplies can be maintained.

"Everybody has a role in fixing our water system," Stone said.

Tom Tomich, director of the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at U.C. Davis, said that although impacts of global warming on the San Joaquin Valley are still being deter-



CHUCK HARVEY | From left, Andrew Stone, Martin Querin and Kamyar Guivetchi discuss water technology at a recent conference in Clovis.

mined, the current drought is not typical. Besides drought, it was a uniquely warm year, he said.

"We have less snowpack and more variability," Tomich said. "Extreme events are becoming more frequent."

He added that demand for fresh water will continue to grow. "There will be continued growth in human population through 2100," Tomich said. "That will intensify competition for fresh water."

Stone said groundwater storage must be taken more seriously. He said part of the solution is to develop water reclamation systems that can provide more treated water

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AROUND TULARE COUNTY

Visalia Civic Center plan wins backing

John Lindt – CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The majority of the Visalia City Council is backing a preliminary plan put forward by Councilmember Greg Collins to lay out the new Civic Center facing a planned park and waterway.

The council earlier this month approved the location of the first building in the East Downtown plan. The Visalia Emergency Communications Center (VECC) along School Street will cost \$15 million and be completed by December 2015.

In its approval, the council also requested to retain a 50-foot offset of the Jennings Ditch to retain the landscaping and future potential trail and enhance the park-like setting of the area.

Collins argued to help "create excitement" over the plan and draw in private development. He's looking at a multi-year plan to construct the streets and lay out the area around a centerpiece, the new Civic Center, facing an oak-studded green area and lake.

He would invite the private sector to participate, but not spend the

Tulare County | 3



EARL “STICKS” BROWN

Owner / CEO

Sticks Brown Group / Radiant Ride



Tell us about Radiant Ride.

Radiant Ride is a vehicle appearance maintenance program for new car buyers. What makes our program unique is our all-inclusive coverage. We cover the costs for most cosmetic repairs as well as surface protection damage. Today's consumers keep their cars longer, so maintaining a vehicle's appearance is more important than it was in the past.

Earlier this year, you were a finalist in the San Joaquin Entrepreneur Challenge, an American Idol style competition. How did that experience help you?

In addition to networking with fellow entrepreneurs in the Challenge, I received valuable advice and ideas from successful business owners who also served on the judging panel. Their critique of my business plan has enabled me to visualize company growth and implement strategies that will scale my company regionally, and throughout California. Through my participation, I was also able to develop a supportive relationship with the Small Business Development Center and staff.

What sparked your interest in the automotive aftercare market?

To start, I simply love keeping my own car looking great. I also have experience in the field. Right out of college, I worked for a car care products manufacturer. I learned the business from the ground up, starting with distributor training. That eventually led to sales and marketing management. Drivers, especially here in California, want their vehicles to look sharp. Between products and accessories, it's a \$22 billion a year industry nationally.

Can you give us an example of how your program works?

Let's say someone dings your door in a parking lot while you're shopping. It's a bummer. You can go home and try to fix it yourself, which is a hassle and doesn't usually look good. You can pay someone to fix it, but that's expensive. In these tough times, fixing a ding is definitely in the unnecessary expense category, so many people just live with their dings. But if you have a Radiant Ride warranty, the next time you have your car serviced, you can get that ding repaired at no extra expense or time involved.

How long ago did you launch Radiant Ride?

We began working on our business model for Radiant Ride three years ago. As part of the process, we consulted with many dealerships, mobile techs, and consumers. Our feedback and research enabled us to determine which features customers most desire in a vehicle appearance package. We launched in May 2013.

How has the dealer response been?

Dealer response has been excellent. Currently, we are in nine dealerships in the Modesto-Stockton area and one in the Sacramento area. Our focus now is on Fresno. We have a deal with Clawson Motors and are in discussions with several other Fresno area dealerships.

Why did you choose to expand south first, rather than north?

The Fresno automotive market is the largest in the Central Valley. The area is also well populated with excellent cosmetic repair specialists who can handle dealer and customer demand for our services. With this in mind, Fresno was the logical choice for initial expansion. We plan to establish Radiant Ride in dealerships from Fresno to Sacramento this year.

EDUCATION: BA Communications, University of the Pacific

AGE: 57

FAMILY: Married to Ruth, with two adult children

Do you use traditional or “new” marketing techniques?

I would say traditional at this point. We invested in nice marketing/sales materials for presentation purposes and showroom displays. We also created a professionally designed website, and we're working to co-brand on dealership websites. I anticipate we will explore newer marketing techniques such as social media, as well. For now, most of our regional growth is through dealer referrals.

What did you do before launching Radiant Ride?

I built a good career in the automotive aftermarket prior to Radiant Ride. However, when the auto industry entered the recession, my business was severely impacted. To make ends meet, I worked as the Manager of Business Development for Goodwill Industries of San Joaquin Valley, Inc.

Where do you see your company ten years from now?

I hope to get Radiant Ride in hundreds of auto dealerships around the country and become recognized nationally as the industry leader in vehicle appearance services.

What are your volunteer activities within the community?

As with most new enterprises, my time is limited for community involvement. For now, I do enjoy participating in Rotary Read In and Pink October Awareness events.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I hit the gym three days a week for workouts and play golf when time permits. Spending time with family on day trips and BBQs in the backyard are the best.

What was your first job growing up and what did you learn from it?

At 14, I worked as a busboy at the Rough & Ready Naval Base Post of Stockton. I was paid \$1.83 per hour and had to catch public transportation to get to work. What I learned most was punctuality — making sure I caught the bus on time to get to work on time. I also learned about being highly efficient on the job by organizing how all the kitchen items were cleaned.