Edy's Adds Jobs As Consumers Demand "Comfort Food"

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (AP) — Making ice cream is no cake walk.

Some time ago, an Edy's Grand Ice Cream job candidate was asked what he thought working at the Fort Wayne plant would be like.

The description smacked of Willy Wonka.

"He thought there were these huge mixing bowls with guys standing on ladders stirring the ice cream with large wooden spoons," said Gaylord Brooks, a production floor leader and 15-year veteran at the local Edy's plant.

"A lot of people have ideas about how it's done, but there's a little more to it than that."

Edy's expects to fill 120 full-time production positions — paying about $13 an hour — within the next three months because of demand for its popular Nestle Drumsticks. A sales spike prompted the company to invest nearly $65 million over the last two years at the Fort Wayne location.

In 2008, Edy's added 114 workers. The company will employ about 700 after the 120 positions are filled. The factory also churns out Edy's Ice Cream, Nestle Lil' Drums, Skinny Cow and Eskimo Pie products.

Edy's parent company, Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream Inc. of Oakland, Calif., is a more-than-$2 billion business with 7,000 employees and four other plants nationwide. The dessert maker has locations in California, Utah and Maryland.

The Fort Wayne facility is the lone plant experiencing sizable investment, officials said.

Rick Benson, people support manager, has a ready explanation for Edy's expansion at a time when other companies are cutting back.

"We're trying to ride out a recession, and so people aren't splurging on big-ticket items," he said. "What they can splurge on, though, is ice cream. It's a comfort food that allows you to indulge and treat yourself and not spend a fortune."

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